SHORT STORIES

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No. 726.] Week ending November 29th, 1902. [Price One Penny.

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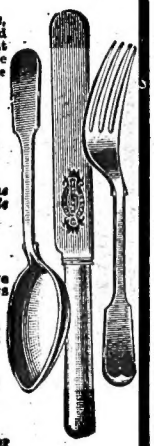

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Short Stories.

No. 726. For the Week Ending November 29th, 1902. One Penny.

FASCINATING NEW SERIES. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who is staying at Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Her enthusiasm is misinterpreted. Instantly all is confusion. The guide, however, snatches Belinda from danger, and hurries them away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, then suddenly with a cry of: "It is you, you! Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all. He's David Carr," throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

Another suitor now appears—Lord Reginald Davenant, at one time in love with Mrs. Murchison Lee, who is also at Cairo. The slighted Mrs. Lee, or "Midge," as she is called is furious, and threatens violence to Belinda. Lady Peggy checkmates her, however, by robbing her of her morphia (to which she is a slave) and her hypodermic syringe.

That same evening, Lady Peggy suddenly discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

Belinda Receives Her First Proposal.

"My dear Duke," I cried, paying no heed to Stanley's evident annoyance, "wherever is Belinda? I've been looking for her this hour or more!"

"You must have *overlooked* her in your haste, Lady Peggy," interrupted Stanley; "the young lady was in the courtyard of the hotel five minutes since."

"Oh, no," I said, shaking my head, "*that* was not Belinda. She and the Duke went off this morning to explore the desert. I expected them back some hours ago. Indeed, I've been quite anxious at their non-appearance."

Then turning to Eastacres. "Where is she, Duke? You ought not to have left her."

"Indeed, Lady Peggy, I parted from Miss North only a short distance from the Mena, she can't have come to any harm."

"*Harm*," I repeated; "you little know Belinda. As likely as not she's started off on an expedition to the Bedouins, or gone for a ramble up the Pyramids. She's so impetuous."

"I don't think you need worry yourself. Still, if it will relieve your anxiety, I'll go and look for her."

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"A good idea," said Stanley, "I'll join you in the search. We shall shortly return with the lost sheep, Lady Peggy; until then——" He paused and moved towards the Duke.

"Oh, no," I cried, "that won't do at all. It's foolish for both to look in the same direction. You go towards the hotel, Eastacres. Mr. Forbes and I will search about here."

Thus appealed to, Stanley could not very well refuse.

"I'll see you later on at the Mena, Duke," he called after the other's retreating figure. Eastacres gave a gesture of compliance and walked rapidly towards the hotel.

Stanley, with an air of great politeness, offered me his arm and suggested that if we were going to search we'd better begin.

"I'm at your disposition for an hour," he said, "after which time I'm afraid that I must leave you." He smiled as he spoke, and I knew he had seen through my manœuvre—Stanley and I had had more than one passage of arms in the days gone by—I knew also that unless I took decisive action he would yet meet the Duke that night. I had only delayed, not prevented, the scene.

"Do you know why I interrupted you and Eastacres?" I asked him abruptly.

"My dear Lady Peggy, you are a woman of such infinite resource that it would be the merest vanity on my part to attempt to fathom any of your reasons."

"I'll tell you," I said, gazing at him steadily. "I did it for your sake. I know why you wish to speak in private to the Duke. I guess all that you wish to say to him. But"—I laid my hand upon his arm—"but you must not speak to him until I have told you what I have to tell."

"It's very nice of you to interest yourself on my behalf, Lady Peggy."

"You think I'm playing with you, Stanley? Talking to gain time. Well, I'll prove you are mistaken. Listen! You wished to ask the Duke to-night for news of Sheila Kenwyn?"

The shot went home. His face grew tense, his eyes flashed, he gripped me tightly by the arm.

"Where is she?" he asked hoarsely. "Where is Sheila?"

"I cannot tell you now," I answered steadily.

He fell back, suddenly, swiftly, self-controlled once more.

"Supposing I did intend to question Eastacres on this particular matter. Why should you try to stop me?"

"Because," I came quite close, looking up at him with earnest, pleading eyes, "I feel for you, as a woman of my age can feel for a man of yours. Because I'm sorry for you, and regret the brilliant future you have let slip by. Is it so difficult to believe in my sincerity?"

"You are more than good," he said courteously.

I threw out my hands with a gesture of appeal. "You make it very hard for me, Stanley. Surely it is not more difficult for a woman of fashion to do a kindness than an injury?"

"Come," he said smiling, "let us be more definite. Why am I not to see the Duke to-night?"

"You suspect him of being concerned in Sheila's disappearance," I returned. "Once let him know your suspicion and he will do his best to thwart you. Leave it to me."

He stopped me with a gesture.

"The thing is impossible," he said sternly; "I think we had better drop the discussion." He gazed at me with keen scrutinising eyes and I felt myself turn cold. For the moment I was at a loss what next to do. It was evident unless I played a bolder and stronger game, I should make no impression upon Forbes. He would meet the Duke, a scene, a scandal would result, and then——

Suddenly an inspiration seized me. I took a desperate resolve.

"Stanley," I cried, "you doubt me, doubt my sincerity. I'm going to prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt. You suspect that Eastacres induced your cousin to leave home. I don't suspect—I *know*."

I faced him in the moonlight, watching him with half fearful eyes. He was so strong, so keen, so ruthless an examiner that I had need to fear. I was no match for him in fence of tongue.

"You know it?" he turned upon me fiercely.

"I swear it," I answered trembling, and shrank before the agony upon his face.

He turned aside with a muttered oath. The news had given him quite a blow, and he reeled under its force.

"The hound, the cur," he cried, and his arm instinctively shot out. "God, that a thing like that——" He paused. I think the image of the fair young girl, the Sheila whom he had so fondly loved, stayed the words upon his lips. The truth came home to him with crushing force. The truth that she in whom he had believed, as men believe in God, was after all unworthy. Pity he had for her, the victim of a sensualist's vanity, the dupe of a base man's art, but, for the moment, pity was swept aside. His shrine was empty, his idol fallen to the ground; he was immersed in sorrow for himself.

"You know where she is to be found?" he said at last.

"I do."

"Then tell me." And he flashed a look stern, and compelling, at my face.

"Not now," I answered. "No," as he made a gesture of impatience, "I'm not to be moved in this particular. If I give you her address to-night, what will happen? Indignation will work upon you, until in a sudden rage you fall upon the Duke."

"That," he replied, "will take place in any case. To-night's as good a time as any."

"I beg your pardon, it would be the worst possible time. You must have some consideration for me, Stanley. I cannot give you the source of my information. I must not, I dare not. Were you to insist on seeing Eastacres to-night my name would inevitably crop up. Besides, there's another and a stronger reason. Eastacres could easily put you off the scent. He could cable to your cousin to leave her present address. A few kind words would even now bring her to his side."

"No more," he said fiercely, "you have said enough on that score. Now tell me, if you please, exactly what you know about my cousin?"

His emotion had cooled down; he was once more the cold, stern, legal expert, trained to weigh each word. He had the reputation of being the most invincible cross-examiner at the Bar. Small wonder therefore, that I felt my courage oozing from me. I simply could not stand the ordeal of a rigid cross-examination.

For the moment I felt a hysterical desire to confess that I knew nothing, that I had been fooling him all the time; anything was better than this awful strain. The next, however, I had pulled myself together.

"If you don't mind, Stanley," I said softly, "I'd rather not. It goes against me to talk about the poor girl. I am too sorry for her to care to speak about it. After all, the chief thing you want is her address. She will tell you her own story, when she sees you. That address," I caught my breath as I uttered the tarradiddle, "that address I will give you in the morning, on condition that you will not seek an interview with the Duke to-night."

"Very well, I will let him alone until to-morrow. You will not fail me; whatever happens I shall have the address?"

"You shall," I answered strangling an incipient scream. Heavens! what an awful predicament was mine, if, after all, the Duke was innocent of Sheila's disappearance!

If I had been mistaken and he did not know the address—I shuddered at the prospect, and conjured up visions of the K.C.'s wrath should I fail to keep my word.

Still, it was more than likely Eastacres was the man. Intuition told me so, and intuition is a very valuable guide. Even

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if my scheme miscarried I should have made a brave bid for success. As time went on, I grew more and more anxious to arrange a marriage between Belinda and the Duke. The horrors of a penniless old age pressed heavily upon me. My health was not so good as it had been, the loss of my fortune had made inroads on my strength. If only I could succeed in getting the girl off my hands securely tied up to a title I could face the future with equanimity.

I was fighting almost for dear life. I could not be expected to be nice in the choice of weapons.

Stanley and I returned in silence to the hotel. He thanked me gravely for my assistance, and arranged to see me next morning at nine o'clock.

It was now close on half-past ten; only the matter of an hour or two before I went to bed, and in those two hours Sheila Kenwyn's hiding-place must be discovered.

The Duke greeted me in the vestibule of the hotel.

"The truant has returned, Lady Peggy," he said, laughing. "Miss North withstood the temptation of a visit to the Bedouins and is here."

"My dear child," I exclaimed, embracing Belinda with effusion, "you have given me an awful fright. Come upstairs and tell me where you've been." I slipped my hand in hers, hoping to get her out of the way without attracting Stanley's notice.

As I might have guessed, however, he was too quick for me.

"If I'm not much mistaken," he said, advancing to Belinda, "you're Hardy North's daughter? I thought so," as she eagerly affirmed the statement. "I know your father quite well, Miss North. I met him last year in the States. He'd run over to New York on business. Did he not mention my name—Stanley Forbes?"

"Of course," Belinda cried. "He said lots about you. Please come and tell me all about the time you spent together."

Nothing loth, Stanley followed the girl into the billiard-room—Belinda eschewed drawing-rooms and other places where women most do congregate on the ground that they depressed her!

It was an annoying thing to have happened. Stanley was the last person whom I should have chosen to hear Belinda's confidences, but to interfere would serve no end. Stanley would not be ruled by me twice in an evening.

I seized the occasion for a talk with Eastacres. We settled ourselves by the window in the blue drawing-room, overlooking the Pyramids. The room was a large one; sheltered by the curtains—imagine curtains in the desert!—we could have our talk out undisturbed.

I motioned him to a seat beside me on the couch. Then without sign or warning launched a bombshell at his head.

"Duke," I said abruptly, "where is Sheila Kenwyn?"

Not by so much as a quiver of his pale, smooth face did he betray surprise. He answered calmly in his usual level tones, "I really cannot tell you, Lady Peggy."

His assumption of innocence would have delighted me on any other occasion. This evening it merely served to irritate me.

"As to that," I returned, "I know better. Let me tell you, Duke, this is no smiling matter. I must ask you to hear my questions with respect. The issue is a grave one, it affects you deeply. How deeply you will understand when I tell you that on that issue hangs your engagement to Belinda."

He gazed at me somewhat mystified.

"My dear lady," he said quietly, "if you would be just a little more explanatory. What has Miss North to do with—with the young lady you mention?"

"A very great deal," I returned brusquely. "Are you aware, Duke, that you have narrowly escaped a most unpleasant scene to-night? Do you know what Stanley Forbes would have said, and done, had I not come between you?"

"You speak in enigmas," he repeated. "Forbes and I went out for a stroll and a chat. Your arrival interrupted our conversation. That's the history of the whole matter, so far as I'm concerned."

For a moment a wild, an awful fear, clutched at my heart. In the face of the Duke's demeanour it seemed impossible to doubt his innocence. No actor, however accomplished, could maintain such a calm, unruffled front, knowing all that was at stake. Fear, however, nerved me to another effort. I must discover Sheila's whereabouts. Who but the Duke could tell me?

"I have heard your version of the affair," I said, "now hear mine. Stanley Forbes suspects that you are responsible for his cousin's disappearance. I had it from himself. He is prepared to go to any lengths to prove your complicity, will stick at nothing to show your guilt. Only one thing will avert a scene, a scandal between you. And that is"—I paused—"that is Sheila's address."

I watched him closely as I spoke, seeking to read his secret in the calm, unsmiling face. But I was baffled—the narrowest scrutiny gave me no clue. And yet, and yet he must be guilty. In Heaven's name he must be guilty.

"No one dislikes a scene or deprecates a scandal more than I," he said at last; "but if Forbes forces an interview upon me, I cannot decline it."

At that I lost my patience. At this rate I might beat the air for hours and be no nearer what I wanted.

"You can and must," I said emphatically. "The interview will terminate in a scene, the scene will result in a scandal. The scandal"—I laid my hand upon his arm—"will put a stop immediately to any thought of marriage between you and Belinda."

I sat back as I finished, and had the satisfaction of seeing the Duke's face change at my words.

I had stung him at last and to some purpose. He rallied quickly, and returned once more to the charge.

"You set me an impossible task. Consider, how am I persistently to elude this man? If I don't see him here I shall meet him in Cairo. It is only postponing the evil day, how can it be put off for ever?"

I gazed at him steadily.

"By giving me the girl's address," I answered quietly. "Once he has that, all thought of taking vengeance upon you will leave him, provided you are out of sight. Listen," I bent towards him, whispering in his ear. "Forbes knows you are the man, to-morrow he's bent on wresting the truth from you. Your chance, your only chance, is to give me the girl's address to-night. To-morrow early you must start for Cairo. I will see Forbes and send him off to Sheila. Do this and I will help your marriage with Belinda to my uttermost. Refuse——" I stopped significantly.

And then there came a pause—a pause that set me on the rack, midway between hope and fear. I waited in an agony; his next words would clinch the issue one way or the other. At that moment a curious look came into his eyes; he stroked his fair moustache, and seemed to hesitate. It was as though——

"Duke," I said softly, "give me the address. I don't want to know any details of the business. I don't care whether or not you are responsible for Sheila's disappearance—that's beside the point. It doesn't matter what you've done so long as people don't suspect it."

"What do you promise me—in exchange," he said slowly. "Supposing——"

"Have done with that," I cried excitedly. "Answer me 'yes' or 'no.' Have you the address?"

A second he wavered, then low but distinct the answer came.

"I have."

With a sigh of relief I sank back wearily against the cushions. The battle was over, I had won!

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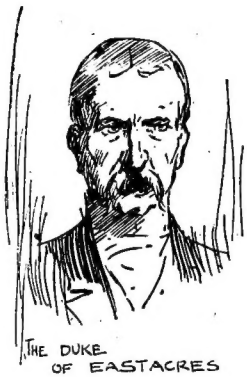
THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

After a pause he took a card from his pocket-book and scribbled an address.

"She was there a month ago," he said carelessly, "and as I haven't heard I suppose she's still there."

I glanced curiously at the card. It contained the name of a villa in a small village in Italy, hidden away among the Alps. The name sent my thoughts into the past. I recalled the fair, sweet Irish girl as I had first seen her. A tall slip of a girl, with big dark eyes and a lovely Irish smile. It was a pity, yes, a cruel pity. I turned my eyes upon the Duke. Serene and undisturbed, no memories of the poor girl grieved him, no thought of the girl whose life he had ruined troubled him. It would, I thought, have been more decent could he assume a little shame. At that moment I felt that I disliked him. But after all it was no affair of mine. The girl had only paid the price of her own foolishness. Still I was sorry.

The Duke broke in upon my musing.

"I understand I am to leave for Cairo about eight to-morrow morning," he said, smiling. "It's an early hour, still I'll contrive to manage it. Forbes you are going to tackle by yourself—awfully good of you. And now"—he glanced hard at me—"what of Belinda?"

"Belinda will go with you," I said. "She will revel at the prospect of an early morning ride. Once you are at the Continental, the Duchess, I am sure, will take my place and chaperon her until I return. I shall be back in the evening. Duke"—I tapped him lightly on the shoulder—"it's time something definite was settled between you and Belinda."

"It's a little early to speak yet, I think," he returned.

I shook my head.

"Under other circumstances, perhaps, but as we are placed delay is dangerous; at any moment some interfering woman with a garrulous tongue may come and tell Belinda fairy tales about your past. And such tales would take effect. You must speak to her to-morrow evening. If you win her consent freely so much the better. If not——" I paused. "Girls are foolish!" I murmured. "Belinda is no wiser than the rest. She is tender-hearted, and if you are distressed she will say something kind—you might put a more favourable construction on the words and——"

Our eyes met. Under his fair moustache his thin lips curled with a smile— a cruel, cold smile, that augured ill for Belinda.

"And now," he said, "one other question. Have you gathered anything as to Mr. North's intentions as to his daughter's dowry?"

I smiled.

"There'd be no difficulty as to that," I answered. "Whatever his prospective son-in-law likes to ask the Australian will be glad to grant. A duke can name his own price."

"A thousand thanks. And now, perhaps, I'd better say good-night?"

I cordially agreed with him; it would have been folly to risk a meeting with Stanley. I was just about to follow the Duke's example and retire myself when a really terrible thing happened.

With dress disordered, face haggard, and eyes fearful to see, so wild were they, Mrs. Murchison-Lee staggered across the threshold of the room.

In a second I realised what had happened. I had been so engrossed in my conversation with the Duke that Midge had slipped from my mind. It was now some hours since I had abstracted the hypodermic syringe, and she was suffering for the lack of it. I saw at a glance that unless she had an injection of morphia immediately the consequences would be serious, if not fatal. She had all but reached the limit of human endurance, her agony was distressing to witness. She seemed unable to breathe, a leaden pallor overcast her face, from which all look of youth had vanished. She was a wreck, mental, moral and physical, such a wreck as morphia maniacs eventually become.

She walked unsteadily to the middle of the room, with feverish glances left and right. Catching sight of me she strove to speak, but only a hoarse murmur came from her lips. Then, with a sudden collapse, she fell, and lay inert and helpless upon the floor.

Immediately there was a hubbub. The women gathered round the unfortunate Midge cackling like a lot of geese, far more concerned to look at than to help her. As for me, I flew upstairs and did not pause for breath until I found the syringe and the morphia. Grasping them tightly in my hand I re-entered the drawing-room. Time was flying, minutes were precious, each second of delay was dangerous. For one heart-sickening moment I thought I was too late. I had delayed too long; she would die for lack of the drug.

The room swam before me, my hand shook, I was within an ace of giving way. The sight of Stanley and Belinda, who had just come upon the scene, gave me courage. He was a strong man used to handle crises with decision.

"Get these women out of the way!" I said hurriedly. "She is suffering from want of morphia. Clear the room, lock the door, and I'll give her an injection."

In a minute the room was silent; empty, save for Stanley, Belinda and Lord Davenant, who, poor boy, was standing terror-stricken at Midge's side. She was looking more than ever ghastly, and at sight of her the sense of apprehension at my heart was like a heavy weight.

Trembling I slipped up her sleeve—the round white arm was already disfigured with innumerable punctures—and just above the elbow inserted the needle; and then, breathless, waited the result.

What if she should die—if the victim of this fashionable form of drug-taking should pay the penalty of her habit? What if it should be discovered that I had abstracted the morphia?

A thousand thoughts and pictures hurried through my brain. And through them all the white face of the girl—she was but little more—rose before me. Here in my hand was the secret of her wonderful vivacity, her flow of spirits, her brightness and her charm; the leaden pallor, the look of age, the torpidity of nerve and will, each was part of the price she had to pay.

The blue eyes suddenly opened and gazed into mine. I gave a sigh of relief and rose quickly to my feet. After that the morphia quickly took effect. Her face grew fair and round once more, the pretty pink flooded her cheeks, she was again the dainty and bewitching Midge.

But though her looks recovered tone, her nerves did not so quickly respond to the action of the drug. Catching sight of Reg she started to her feet, and, with an hysterical cry, clasped him by the arm.

"Reg," she cried piteously, "you have been so unkind to me! I've suffered cruelly, all because of you." Then, as he made no response, she fell to crying, weeping with the ease and unrestraint of a little child. "Say you're fond of me," she insisted. "Tell me you care more for me than anybody else." It was awkward for young Davenant, and under the circumstances he behaved very well. He soothed her as far as she would permit herself to be soothed, and strove to quieten the terrible sobs that choked her utterance. But for all that it was easy to see he was putting constraint upon himself. The scene filled him with disgust; her tears, which once would have plunged him in distress, annoyed and irritated him. In brief, he was no more in love with Midge. Belinda had commenced, and morphia had finished his disillusionment.

With a woman's intuition Midge realised this was so. She turned furiously upon Belinda.

"*You've* done this!" she said. "You've taken him from me, you cruel girl!"

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"Don't be absurd!" replied Belinda promptly. "I don't care *that* for Lord Davenant!" and she snapped her fingers inelegantly but with emphasis in Reggie's face. "You wouldn't either, if you had any sense," she continued. "Come," she put her arm protectingly about the other's waist, "I'm going to take you to bed. You'll feel better in the morning."

Yielding to persuasion, Midge allowed herself to be led away, and the strangely-assorted pair—the young girl and the flighty matron—went off together.

"It's awful!" groaned Reggie, as the door shut behind them. "I shall never forget it. How *can* a woman make such a spectacle of herself?"

I shrugged my shoulders in reply. Most Society women use morphia nowadays, as Reggie knew quite well. Few are such fools as to give themselves away, as Midge had done.

Before I went to bed that night I arranged for Belinda to accompany the Duke to Cairo the following day. As I expected, she was charmed with the idea, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the two start together as arranged just before eight o'clock next morning.

They were still in sight when Stanley Forbes presented himself. I handed him Sheila Kenwyn's address without more ado.

"You will start at once, I suppose?" said I.

"After I have seen the Duke," he returned.

I smiled and drew him to the window.

"You'll need to hurry if you want to overtake him, Stanley. Look!" and I pointed to the specks against the sky-line—Belinda and Eastacres—fast vanishing from the horizon.

"Who's the girl?" he asked laconically.

"Belinda North," I answered. "She went with the Duke this morning. At her own request, not mine," I added, reading the question in his eyes.

"There's no suggestion of marriage between that fellow and Belinda?" he asked incredulously.

"That's for Belinda to decide—no one else will have a voice in the matter," I said earnestly. "Her father gives the girl her own way absolutely."

He seemed to hesitate, then with a shrug turned from the window.

"If that's so," he said, "it's all right. Belinda's not likely to be taken in by a man like Eastacres. If I thought there was the least danger I'd follow her now and warn her. As it is I needn't trouble; she can take care of herself. I shall start at once for Italy; the Duke can wait till I come back."

With a smile I wished him all success. I was most relieved to see the last of him.

I returned to Cairo by myself; the rest of the party were remaining at the Mena for a day or two. I arrived at the Continental about eight, and slipped quietly upstairs to my sitting-room. There was a sound of voices within—the Duke's and Belinda's. With some dexterity I noiselessly turned the handle of the door, opened it, and gazed into the room.

And what I saw therein filled me with great rejoicing!

The Duke who had just finished speaking, was gazing earnestly into Belinda's face. Her head was drooping, her face flushed. To any other girl I should have applied the epithet "shy" in describing the state of her feelings, but Belinda, I believe, was a stranger to the sensation.

Turning towards Eastacres she spoke few words in a low voice—words that I did not catch. Then with a charming gesture—a gesture of encouragement—stretched out her hand and laid it in the Duke's. He pressed it closely, stepped forward—and the next instant clasped Belinda in his arms!

[*This series of articles has already created a great sensation amongst readers of* SHORT STORIES. *The insight which it gives into the manner in which those in the "Smart Set" spend (and often waste) their lives has amazed those who are fortunate enough to belong to the great Middle Class. Although names have for obvious reasons been altered, the facts are absolutely correct, and the statements made are in no way exaggerated.—Ed. S.S.*]

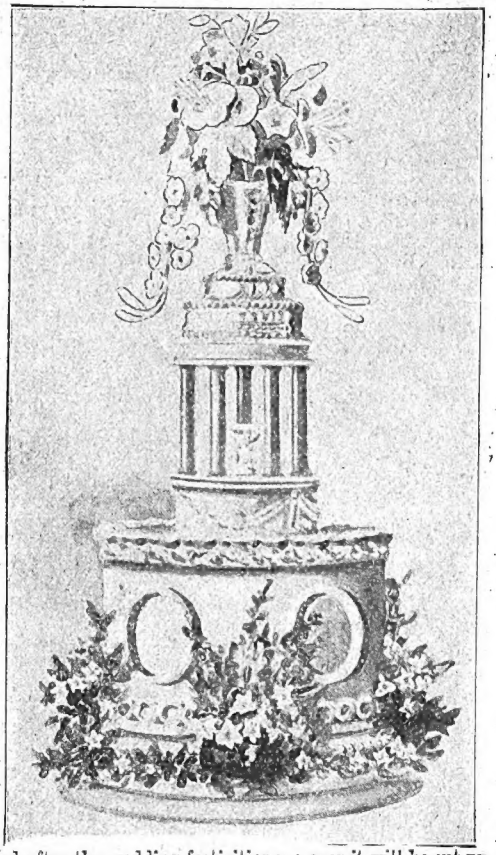
THE BEAUTIFUL BRIDE-CAKE

that we shall divide amongst 101 readers.

The lovely ornament at the top will go to one reader—perhaps you.

Miss Madge Morris will be married on Tuesday, December 2nd.

We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris,



and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether, a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner, to arrive not later than Monday, December 1st.

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THE CAPITULATION OF CELIA.

A Tale of a Quarrel.

"Did I tell you that I had asked auntie to come here, Len?"

"No, you certainly did not," replied Leonard Vancourt, his forehead lowering into a frown, as he helped himself to a second piece of toast. "Might I inquire which of the two is going to afford us the delirious delight of her presence. Clarissa the saturnine, or Amelia the magpie imitator?"

"Len!" The delicately-traced eyebrows were raised in indignant expostulation. "I think that it is particularly unkind of you to speak in that manner of my relations. You used to say that aunt Amelia was a shrewd business woman."

"I would be the last to deny her that qualification, Celia," remarked Vancourt grimly. "It was positively a stroke of genius the way the old reptile—ahem—lady, palmed off on to me that property in Southwark. Fifteen houses, my dear, with only rudimentary drainage and a hungry County Council waiting on me to render the same effective. Aunt Amelia ought to have been a company promoter. Egad, she would have made her fortune at the game, my respected aunt-in-law has it in her bones. Where is the *Daily Express?*"

Celia's lip commenced to quiver.

"I think that you are horrid, Len," she vouchsafed at length, glancing reproachfully at her husband, who suddenly became immersed in the money market column of the paper, which he had discovered under the table.

"I must say that I think you are particularly unkind to speak of my relations in the way you always do! You should not forget, dear, that aunt Clarissa has been more than a mother to me, and brought me up since I was a tiny tot; the first time you ever met me, Len, was at her house."

"I know," replied Vancourt casually. "But if it hadn't been for Gus Harrington taking me to Rutland Gate I should never have seen either of you. I remember the evening well. I took an instinctive dislike to your respected, more than a mother of an aunt! A feeling incidentally which has intensified ever since."

"You used to say that you were very fond of her—before we were married, Len."

Vancourt coughed, drily.

"I was diplomatic, Celia," he said quietly, as, laying aside his paper, he buttered a piece of toast. "You see, as I could only see you in her house, I was obliged, in a sort of way, to hold the candle to the—your aunt."

"She was very fond of you, Len." Celia Vancourt's eyes were bent reproachfully on his.

"Ahem! That was very kind of her, dear. You see, Celia, I had shekels; in London Society I was considered rather a decent match, at the time I married you." His accent was irritatingly sardonic.

"Do you mean to insinuate that aunt Clarissa liked you because you were well off and had a house in Park Lane?" demanded Celia, her face flushing an angry pink.

"Aunt Amelia did, anyway," smiled Vancourt unfeelingly. "My spare cash made her Southwark property boom in a manner which brought a smile to her face! She had me on toast, Celia."

She rapped her knife impatiently on the immaculate damask. "Leonard," she remarked with dignity. "I would have you remember that you are speaking of my relations."

"I have no desire to rob you of their ownership, dear," remarked Vancourt; then added, as he commenced his breakfast in real earnest, "I wish to goodness that you would manage to see that we get bacon for breakfast that is not salty enough to skin the inside of one's mouth. I don't believe that the tradesmen would dare to sell such abominable meat to anybody else but us."

Celia's face grew tearful looking, as she poured herself out a cup of tea; then, glancing across the table at the sombrely annoyed features of her husband, said irritably:

"I never met such a growling man as you are in my life! The moment anything puts you out, you quarrel with your food. Goodness knows, I am fanciful enough, but I don't find this bacon a bit salty."

"Of course not! It is quite sufficient for me to say that it is for you to declare the contrary," said Vancourt angrily. "I never met such a contradictory woman as you are in the whole course of my existence. I am just about sick of it!"

"And I am tired to death of you and your grumbling," retorted Celia, flushing with anger: "Everything that I do is wrong. I can't make out what on earth made you marry me!"

"Because I was a victim to the throes of drivelling lunacy, that's why," said Vancourt savagely. "I wish now that I had never set eyes on you. Why, ever since my marriage I have never known what it is to have a decent breakfast! If I don't get a high egg, I get salt bacon which a sailor would kick at, and if I get neither of those two things I have a piece of fish which would disgrace an East End cook shop put in front of me!"

He sniffed indignantly, as, turning in his chair, he picked up his discarded paper and, flattening it out angrily, commenced to read its contents.

"Very well, Leonard," said Celia, dignity struggling with tears for mastery in her voice. "Since you are as sorry to have ever met me as I am to have ever come across you I will ask aunt Clarissa when she comes here——"

"I tell you she isn't coming here!" interrupted Vancourt peremptorily. "I won't have the old cat in the house—so there! I'm master here, kindly remember."

"And I am mistress!" retorted Celia. "So aunt Clarissa shall come and——"

"What?"

"And when she does I—I—shall tell her that—how unkind you are—and—and ask her to take me away," continued Celia in a faltering voice, unheeding his interruption. "I—I never—want to see you again—I hate you!"

"Oh, very well, then." Vancourt rose with as much dignity as he could assume. "As such is the case, and since I am not allowed to be master of my own house, we had better separate amicably. I, for one, shall be very pleased to be freed from a nagging woman!"

"And I, from a—brute!"

"That is a question of opinion," remarked Vancourt easily. "I have been asked by Carstairs to go for a cruise, and as his yacht leaves Southampton the day after to-morrow I may as well go with him, until I have decided what I will do. Of course, I shall leave you the house—I will clear out." He crossed the room to the door, adding, as he opened it, "There will be enough money paid into your account to satisfy your requirements." Then, without awaiting a reply, he closed the door behind him, Celia gazing half disconsolately, half defiantly, at the vacant chair on the other side of the table.

Vancourt had not been gone long, before he returned, dressed in faultless style, a Raglan over his arm and a bowler in his hand.

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"Well, I'll say good-bye," he said lightly, extending his hand to his wife. "I've told Job to pack up my duds and to bring them to me at the Carlton. I shall be stopping there till to-morrow morning, when I shall leave for Southampton."

"I see."

"We shall be cruising about the Mediterranean for about two months," he continued, eyeing his wife covertly as he spoke. "After which I may go to South Africa for a few months to do some big game shooting."

"You will enjoy yourself, I hope," said Celia, placing her slim hand in his. "Of course, if we ever meet in Society we need not be dead cuts, need we, Leonard?"

Her deep blue eyes were raised almost wistfully to his.

"Of course not," he said with a strained laugh, as, pressing her cold hand in his, he went towards the door. "*Addio*, little woman, it is a pity that we could not get on better. However, it is best that we should go our several ways, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it is! Good-bye." Her voice faded away into a whisper, adding quaveringly to herself as the door closed behind her husband, "he might have kissed me before he went. I don't think that—he minded leaving me and I—I—oh, I don't care!" she cried angrily, dashing away the tears which had gathered on her lashes. "If he had tried to kiss me, I'd have slapped his face for him! I hate Leonard, and now that I am free I shall be as happy as——"

The harsh clang of the hall door below caused her to stop abruptly. For a moment Celia stood silent, then, sinking on to a sofa, she buried her fluffy head amid a bevy of cushions, and cried as if her heart would break.

"He's gone!" she muttered in a strangled voice, broken by sobs. "And—I made—sure that he would come—back."

Meanwhile, outside in the street, Leonard Vancourt hailed a hansom, and, stepping into it, was soon bowling in the direction of the Carlton. "I am afraid that I have made a fool of myself," he soliloquised. "I made sure that she would have stopped me before I left the house; of course, it's all most unearthly rot to think for a moment that I could live without my little Celia. A day would be bad enough, but two months—I have half a mind to turn back and say that I was only bluffing, only I should look such an ass if I did. I might have kissed her before I left, though! Poor little girlie, she half raised her face to mine when I said good-bye and—oh, I am going to chuck this fool's game and shall toddle back, and she can stodge me with high eggs and salt bacon as much as she jolly well likes if she will only take me on again, Cabby, I——"

His sentence was never finished, for, as he pushed open the trapdoor above his head, the pole of a brewer's dray crashed into the side of the hansom.

* * * * *

When Leonard Vancourt came to his senses it was to find himself swathed in bandages lying in bed in a darkened and familiar room, whilst curled up beside him on the immaculate counterpane, sat Celia, her slim fingers cooling his fevered brow.

"Hullo, girlie," he exclaimed, with a weak attempt at hilarity. "I haven't gone after all, you see."

"Are you sorry, Len, that such is not the case?" she queried gently, nestling her tear-stained cheek against his.

"Would you mind, dearest—I mean—Celia—if I said that I was glad?" he asked slowly.

"Mind! Oh, Len, you are the dearest boy in all the world!" she cried, impulsively. "I thought that you would have come back, and when I found that you did not I just sat down and wrote to the Carlton to ask you to, dear."

"And I hoped that you would call me back, Celia," he said delightedly. "And when I found that you did not, girlie, I thought that I would just come back and say that you might do any mortal thing you jolly well liked, if you would only take me on again, Celia."

She passed her hand caressingly over his cheek.

"Call me girlie," she whispered happily. "You know, dearest, how I hate Celia."

"I don't," Vancourt replied fondly. "I love her better than the whole world! Kiss me, girlie."

H. Morton Baird.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 25.—If the birthday falls on this day the next twelve months will be favourable for business and speculation; good for literary people.

Girls will find love affairs run smoothly; a good year to marry.

The day is promising for buying and selling, dealing with professional men, writing letters and signing agreements.

A child born to-day will be generous, cheerful, and fortunate. Would do well as a broker, in the church, or any profession.

November 26.—A mixed year; health will need attention; some annoyance in business. Good for young people, but not for the aged.

Girls will have many crosses in love affairs, and need care against deceit.

The day is evil for most matters. Don't ask favours; defer doing business with farmers, landlords and elderly people.

A child born here will be changeable, over cautious, but will possess good mental abilities.

November 27.—Give attention to business through the next year; avoid quarrels and law. Bereavement is likely.

Young girls will have more than usual attentions from opposite sex, and if engaged they marry.

The day is favourable for asking favours; dealing with shipping agents, drapers, and those in authority. Beware of mishaps.

A child born here will be cheerful, active and proud.

November 28.—An active year, but not very promising for business and financial matters. Avoid speculation and too much pleasure. Girls will find love matters slow and dull.

The day is not good for making changes; better to sell than buy; go quietly.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate in most things. Will be active and ingenious, but too free with money.

November 29.—An active and prosperous year is shown to be in store for those whose birthdays fall to-day. Pleasant events in domestic circle.

Girls become engaged or marry.

The day is good for most things; write letters and sign agreements; marry, visit, and make new friends.

A child born to-day will be affectionate, generous, and clever, perhaps too fond of pleasure and society.

November 30.—An active and fortunate year for business and finances; beware of heavy colds, and keep the temper under control.

Pleasant events for girls in courtship; if engaged they will have opportunities of marriage.

A child born here will be fortunate, though the health will need some care in early and latter years. A happy marriage is promised.

December 1.—A year of change and uncertainty; avoid speculation; insure against fire and accident. Be cautious in business.

Girls need care in love affairs; those born near 10 p.m. meet with deceit and anxiety.

The day is one on which to let others make the first move Beware of mishap in the early morning. Place little faith in promising speculations or news.

A child born here will be rash, unsettled, and will travel much. Will be liable to accidents.

Asturel.

Colonel Jim.

What a Man Did for a Woman's Sake.

It was the smoke-room of the "Cosmopolitan" Club in Piccadilly.

I had strolled in for the want of something better to do, and without any thought or idea of anything or anybody.

There were only about half a dozen members present, to one only of whom—Charlie Maxwell; in his pre-nuptial days an inveterate globe-trotter as I myself still was—I was personally known.

I just nodded to him, as I saw that he was engaged in conversation with an individual whom I never remembered to have seen at the club before.

Though he was sitting back in the depths of a big armchair, I gathered that he was tall and athletically built. His hair and heavy moustache were snowy white, yet his features had that look of perpetual youth about them which some men retain to the close even of patriarchal life.

But it was not so much the wonderful youthfulness of the man (I reckoned him to be at least sixty years of age) as the almost womanly expression of tenderness in his eyes that attracted me. It did not detract one iota from his manliness; it simply supplied the one thing necessary to make that manliness perfect and complete.

I was on the point of leaving when there entered the room a man for whom I, in common with most of the club members, had an unmitigated dislike.

Coarse of speech, ostentatiously vulgar in his manner, and, in fact, an absolute "impossible" from the social point of view, it was a perennial source of wonder with everybody how he could ever have been admitted to "Cosmopolitan" membership.

It was rumoured that he was the millionaire son of a deceased East-end "ready-made" tailor of Semitic descent, and that he owed his admission amongst us to the largely exerted influence of a certain impecunious peer, his great friend, and one of the original promoters of the club.

The truth of this could not be exactly proved, although after events showed that for once rumour did not act up to its reputation for lying.

Almost immediately after this very estimable individual's entrance—his name, by the way, was Marcus Dischman—my friend Maxwell came across to where I stood looking out of the window into Piccadilly, and shook hands, asking me to excuse him for ten minutes, and saying that he would have a chat with me on his return. Complete silence reigned in the room after Maxwell's departure, broken only by the rustle of newspapers or an occasional cough.

Then I was suddenly startled by the voice of Dischman, raised in loud altercation.

I turned sharply round, and saw that he was standing, straddle-legged, in front of the white-haired gentleman's chair, wagging his head and forefinger in time to a stream of angry abuse.

"You've monopolised that paper ever since I've been in the room, and for how long before, goodness only knows! Do you think you've bought the place, just because you've been in the Army!"

The occupant of the armchair rose up out of it to his full height of well over six feet, and calmly laid down the paper he had been reading on the table beside him.

It was then that I noticed for the first time that his right sleeve was empty, indicating the loss of his arm.

"Sir," he said, with quiet irony, "it is evident to me that *you* have not been in the Army, inasmuch as the officer invariably implies the gentleman."

The retort might have been injudicious, but it was certainly richly deserved.

Furious with passion Dischman extended his arm, and violently shook the empty sleeve pinned up to the lapel of the other's coat.

"You dare to taunt me! You!" he shrieked. "How came you by this? Not in battle! No! Do you think I have not heard of a certain gentleman's little affair with a certain young lady? The motor-car ride to Brighton!—too much champagne!—a spill!—and a smashed arm? Do you think I don't know? Bah! you got your deserts, Mr. Officer and gentleman!"

The rest of us thought it high time now to interfere, for the wretched cad was evidently contemplating further violence.

The matter, however, was suddenly taken out of our hands.

Unseen by me, Maxwell had come into the room, and had heard the frantic speech of Dischman's.

As the last word left the bully's mouth Maxwell's hand was on his collar, and his knuckles pressing uncomfortably upon his collar-bone.

Swinging the fellow round, he didn't speak to him, but summoning a waiter, bid him call the club secretary.

Held securely in Maxwell's grip, Dischman looked the picture of vulgar discomfiture.

"Mr. Shaw," said Maxwell to the secretary when he appeared, "I take the responsibility of demanding from you this man's instant expulsion. He has not only grossly insulted Colonel Fergusson, resorting even to personal violence, but by so doing on the club premises has insulted also every member of it. If you do not accede to my request, I, and I think every right-minded, and self-respecting member will immediately send in our resignations."

Maxwell slightly loosened his hold while addressing the secretary, enabling Dischman to shake himself free.

With one glance of scorching hate at his late captor, Dischman, not waiting for the secretary's decision, walked out of the room, and of the club, which latter he has never again entered since that day.

Colonel Fergusson, far from being upset or disturbed by what had occurred, had quietly resumed his seat and his paper.

"Talbot!" said Maxwell, "allow me to introduce you to Colonel James Fergusson, D.S.O., late Dragoon Guards; but known to all who love him as 'Colonel Jim.' Colonel, my old friend Archie Talbot, whom I haven't seen for all the years he has been wandering about the earth."

"Mr. Talbot, pleased to know you; though I warn you to take everything Charlie Maxwell has to say about me with a very large grain of salt."

If the man when silent was attractive, in conversation he was delightful. What I subsequently learnt about him from Maxwell, especially concerning one particular episode of his life, did not in the least surprise me; it simply served to perfect the picture of the noblest man and truest-hearted gentleman that it has ever been my lot to meet.

It was one evening—after a bachelor dinner at Maxwell's house—his wife being in Scotland on a family visit—that my friend told me the true story of the incident, in the course of which "Colonel Jim" had lost his arm, and as a result of which, he had to retire from the Service in the heyday of a most distinguished career.

"Perhaps you don't know," said Maxwell, "that Fergusson and I were in the same regiment. He was full Major when I joined as Second Lieutenant.

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"Though there was a good fifteen years difference of age between us, we became staunch friends. Without being grand-motherly, Fergusson kept me from all sorts of tom-fooleries, such as hot-headed young officers are so apt to indulge in.

"Our Colonel was Harvey Fane, now a Major-General and a K.C.B., with a large family of daughters, and his house was an attractive centre for bachelor officers, eligible and ineligible.

"It was not long before I discovered that Beatrix Fane was more to me than all the other girls of my acquaintance.

"Very soon, too, I was successful in getting her assurance that I, in like manner, was the veritable 'fairy prince.'

"Of course, I confided in Colonel Jim, who, though sympathetic, advised a wise waiting until at anyrate I succeeded to the property, which I inherited six years ago.

"Attached to the regiment was a certain Captain Holroyd, who was said to be connected in some way with a monster firm of East-end clothiers. Anyway, he was very unpopular with all ranks.

"Quite accidentally I heard, the day after the recent affair at the Cosmopolitan, that Holroyd was Dischmann's cousin, hence the fact of the former's knowledge of what I am going to tell you about 'Colonel Jim.'

"This man Holroyd was an inveterate gambler, and nearly always won. It so happened that when I came into the Wharton estate there was a large accumulation of ready money which I immediately proceeded to spend in right royal style. Holroyd, ever on the scent for a pigeon to pluck, suddenly became very friendly with me, and one day invited me to pass a week with him at Brighton. Glad of a change, and having easily obtained leave, I left Aldershot with Holroyd without acquainting 'Colonel Jim' of my intention.

As a matter of fact, I knew perfectly well what would be his advice, and, therefore, I evaded it. I did not even tell Beattie, but wrote her on my arrival at Brighton.

All went well until the third day, except that I lost heavily at bridge to Holroyd, when, after a dinner to which Holroyd had invited two or three other men, we all adjourned for an hour's stroll on the pier.

"Whether it was that, being unused to excessive indulgence in wine, I had taken too much champagne, or whether I was seized with sudden illness, I cannot exactly say. I only know that by some unaccountable means I managed to fall from the pier into the sea, getting a nasty smack through coming into contact with one of the iron cross-girders.

"I remembered nothing more till I found myself alone in my Brighton lodging, wretchedly ill, and very much ashamed of myself.

"The doctor who attended me, a splendid fellow, told me that Holroyd had returned to Aldershot without troubling to find out my real condition.

"That night late, a further surprise was in store for me. Beattie, accompanied by Colonel Jim, the latter with a seriously injured arm, arrived at my diggings in Warrior Square.

"It was soon apparent that Colonel Jim was in a bad way, my doctor, after a brief examination of the injured arm, declaring that immediate amputation was necessary.

"All the time I was in absolute ignorance of how the accident had happened, or how it was that Beattie had come to Brighton in Colonel Jim's company.

"It was not until the operation was over, and Mrs. Fane who was wired for at once, had arrived to look after her wandering daughter, that I learnt the whole story from Beattie's lips.

"As some little explanation of what took place, let me say that both Colonel Fane and Colonel Jim were ardent motorists, each possessing a 12-horse-power Panhard, which they were eternally pitting the one against the other.

"Colonel Jim always drove his car himself, but Colonel Fane, not being so expert, employed a French *chauffeur* at fabulous wages.

"Well, it seems that the day before I recovered consciousness, my landlady, who, up to then, had no clue to the whereabouts of my friends, came across a letter of Beattie's while getting some clean linen for me out of my portmanteau. Without staying to think who the writer might be, she at once wrote to her, and, as it afterwards appeared, gave a very exaggerated account of my condition.

"When my landlady's letter arrived the Colonel's motor was waiting at the door for him on his return from parade.

"Without pause or thought, my foolish, loving little girl imperiously ordered the driver to set off for Brighton there and then, silencing his objections with threats of her father's displeasure if he disobeyed her.

"Was there ever such a mad journey, a journey, too, at which her social world would hold up its hands in holy horror.

"On through Guildford, Tunbridge Wells, Horsham, till the outskirts of Lewes were reached. And there the trouble began.

"The *chauffeur* had insisted more than once on descending at certain inns, and refreshing himself with brandy.

"By the time Lewes was in sight the man was in a state of semi-intoxication, and was quite incapable of controlling the machine.

"Chancing to turn her head at this point, Beattie saw coming up behind them at racing speed half a mile or so

As soon as he was alongside he sprang on to her machine, just in time to avert a catastrophe.

astern, another motor, which, even at that distance, seemed strangely familiar to her.

"Nearer and nearer it drew, the stupefied Frenchman in charge of the leading car becoming more and more unable to steer it.

"It was at a bend in the road that the catastrophe happened.

"On the right hand was a high bank, and into this the driver made to run Beattie's car.

"By a miracle of mercy he could not turn the steering-wheel, overbalancing himself, and falling out under the wheels in front, which passed over his body.

"Though bewildered and panic-stricken, Beattie caught hold of the gear with both trembling hands, and tried to keep the car straight. What would have been the result of her efforts it is hard to say, though it is almost morally certain that in the streets of Lewes she would inevitably have come to grief.

"Now for Colonel Jim's part in it.

"Putting on the pace for a final spurt, he raced alongside of the runaway, managed to stop his own machine at the same moment leaping on to the other one.

"Seizing the steering-wheel with his left hand—his right arm was broken on the leap—he wrenched it round, and brought the car to a full stop.

"Then appeared the representative of the law, who, running back, discovered that the *chauffeur* was fatally injured.

"The rest you know, though there is one little thing more which I will tell you in confidence, as it renders, from my point of view, all that Colonel Jim did that day the more heroic.

"Beattie told me, more than a year after we were married, that some words that escaped her rescuer's lips as he reached her side in the flying car, convinced her beyond all doubt that he loved her, and that he risked his life for the sake of a woman whom he knew had given her heart to another man.

"How Colonel Jim came to follow after Beattie was owing to a servant at the house, who overheard her orders to the *chauffeur*, telling him, as he drove up in his own machine almost directly afterwards and inquired for her. He knew that her action would compromise her with her friends and society, and, in her interests, decided to persuade her to come back.

"Of course the dear old fellow had to leave the Service, though he has since got his step on the retired list. Now, what do you think of him, Talbot?"

"Think of him?" I said, "Why, that for a man among men, I never expect to meet another like 'Colonel Jim!'"

"As you certainly never will!" said Maxwell, raising his glass. "Here's to Colonel Jim, and God bless him!"

Ralph Enderby.

"I NOTICE that you always sit at your wife's left, Mr. Meggs." "Yes," frankly returned Mr. Megs; "that's the side her glass eye is on."

CLARA: "I suppose you have heard that Charley Bigrolle and I don't speak, haven't you?" Maud: "Why, no. What was the trouble?" Clara: "It was all my dressmaker's fault. She forgot to take the pins out of my waistband."

ANXIOUS MOTHER: "I wish, Susan, that when you give baby a bath you would use the thermometer so as to ascertain whether the water is at the proper temperature." Susan: "Oh, don't you worrit about that, ma'am; I don't need no 'mometers. If the little one turns red, the water's too hot; if it turns blue, it's too cold; that's all there is about it."

MISS PASTELLE: "It's too bad! I love you, and I've promised to marry you, and yet there isn't a bit of romance about it. You have never even once saved my life." Adorer: "I haven't, eh? Don't you remember the time you first saw me?" Miss Pastelle: "Yes; I was walking down the avenue, and you passed me on your bicycle." Adorer: "Yes, and I rang the bell for you to get out of the way, didn't I?"

SPECIAL OFFER TO SCOTCH READERS.
See below.

Have You Won a Gramophone Yet?

No! Then Why Not Try To-day?

We are extremely anxious that a goodly proportion of our readers shall become possessed of some substantial reminder of the little paper which comes out every Tuesday, and, perhaps, no more amusing and entertaining gift could be made than that of a Gramophone.

The award of a Gramophone is particularly appropriate just now, as the season of Christmas parties is so close upon us, when the instruments would prove a refreshing variation to the usual indoor games.

With each instrument is given two records, and any reader who has been lucky enough to win one will tell you that they are prizes well worth the winning.

What You Have to Do to Win One.

You must construct an anagram from the words, **"The Albert Gate Mystery,"** the title of the splendid new serial story which commences in a fortnight's time in this paper. That is to say, you must construct a sentence of the letters contained in that title, using every letter, but not more often than the letters appear in the title.

All attempts must be made on the backs of post-cards, which should be marked, **Albert Gate,** and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A Gramophone will be awarded to each of the ten competitors whose sentences are the best in the Editor's opinion.

TO SCOTCH READERS.

FIVE Special Gramophones will be given to the five readers living in Scotland, whose attempts are considered the best of those submitted by Scotch readers. These will be EXTRA prizes.

All attempts must reach us not later than the first post on Tuesday morning, December 2nd.

Result of Third "Serial" Competition.

In the above competition a Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following:

London.—Miss Herrtage, 1 Banbury Road, South Hackney; H. L. Brooks, 55 Foxberry Road, Brockley, S.E.

Under 100 Miles.—B. L. Hammond, 11 North Road, Brighton; F. E. Buckner, 55 London Road, Grays.

Over 100 Miles.—A. Sillito, Amington, Tamworth; W. Pearson, 46 Victor Street, Holderness Road, Hull.

Scotland.—J. Stevenson, 12 Armadale Street, Glasgow; W. Shand, 62 Kirkland Street, Glasgow.

Ireland.—S. Nairn, 51 Denzille Street, Dublin; D. Wallace, 83 Upper Meadow Street, Belfast.

The correct sentence was as follows: "'I have been very uneasy about you,' she said frankly, as he sank into an ample arm chair."—Page 520, column 1, line 3.

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Little Jenny.

A Romance of Love and Music.

"WHAT is it, Jenny?"

A kindly hand was laid on the shoulder of the weeping girl, crouched in a corner of a doorway in a fashionable south coast seaside resort. She looked up, after hastily wiping away the tears that obscured the deep blue eyes, and gazed wistfully, wearily, into the face of him who had spoken.

She was a girl of little more than sixteen; her figure was frail and wretchedly clad, her face was wan and told of privation. So much he could see in the moonlight. And he could also see that the face, now soiled by tears, was full of the promise of loveliness; she would be a beautiful woman, he thought, with an involuntary sigh of admiration.

In her turn she saw a tall, dark, handsome young man of twenty-one. He, too, was but shabbily dressed. He carried a violin under his arm, and he seemed tired.

"What is the matter? Can I do anything for you?" he asked, looking at her with a benevolent and pitying expression. "You seem to be in trouble? Ah, me! I fear that this is a hard world for those upon whom Dame Fortune frowns. My name is Philip Atwood, and I am a violin player; perhaps you have heard of me? I play in the streets *now*, for a living."

"I have not heard," she replied, shaking her head. The touch of bitterness in his voice had escaped her. "I was trying to earn a few pence, to obtain food and a little comfort for my mother, who is old and lives in the country. It was a last resort. Mother says I have a good voice, so I tramped here, where rich people come to spend their money and enjoy life, and I tried to sing. I waited till dark, that they should not see my rags, but I forgot that the hotels have big lights in front. I felt ashamed and I broke down almost at my first note. I tried twice, but I was too nervous and they laughed at me!"

She began to weep again. Somehow, the sight of her grief chased away his own bitterness and he became buoyant in his charitable effort to encourage.

"Oh, that is nothing!" he exclaimed cheerily. "I can tell that you have a sweet voice, and you ought to earn lots of money from these rich people. Never fear! You will be able to take quite a small fortune home to your mother, little one!"

He took her hand and lifted her to her feet.

"Sing something to me!" he said, "and let me be the judge. You are not afraid of me? Come!"

It was a curious scene in the dark street—the girl standing before the youth and, encouraged by his cheeriness, singing a plaintive love-song in a rich, musical voice. Philip stood enraptured as, gaining confidence in the darkness and solitude, she sang with the full sweetness and strength of a voice that was already marvellously developed.

"Ah!" He drew a long breath as she finished. "It is a voice that should bring you a fortune! Go to the hotels and sing! Forget that you are in front of strangers, and think of your mother. Then you will sing with your heart and the money will come! Go! No!" he added immediately, as a thought struck him. "First come with me and have some coffee to refresh you and a piece of cake to give you strength. You will sing better."

"You are very good, Philip!" she replied, calling him by his Christian name in innocent gratitude. "But I cannot take your money; you want it for yourself."

"Nonsense, Jenny!" he responded, calling her by the name he had bestowed upon her when he first saw her. "You can repay me one day, if I want it! You have not told me your name, but I shall call you Jenny. I like it, and we shall meet now and then."

So she went with him to a simple restaurant in a side street, where he made her sit opposite him and partake of the coffee and cake. During the short time the simple repast lasted, he was full of gaiety, making her laugh and befitting her for the task she had before her.

"Now go and sing!" he said, as they parted outside. "I shall see you to-morrow, since you say that you will be here in the evening. Tell me if you notice many rich people there."

He watched her as she went with hesitating steps in the direction of the promenade.

"We might make some money if we could go together, but that would make talk and I cannot play well enough now that my hand has been hurt. No! I'll fiddle away in the daytime and give her the best chance—after dinner, people always feel more generous!"

Jenny took up a position in front of the hotel and, after a moment's hesitation, she began to sing in a rich voice. The air was plaintive and suited her mood, so she rendered it exquisitely. The visitors were attracted; only two or three were listening when she began, but at the end of her song, there was a small crowd.

"Bravo!" shouted some of the men, while the women signified their approval by applauding. If Jenny had been more experienced, she would have walked past and among them with her little cup before singing again, but she was pleased with her reception and treated them to some simple ditties taught to her by her mother.

"Capital!" said one man to another. "She would make a good actress. She was totally different in appearance in the two parts; she looked the embodiment of sadness and pathos during that first song, and now she is quite different—a mischief-loving country girl. Here she comes with her cup. Drop a piece of silver into it for me and we'll square up later."

The result of Jenny's first open air performance was decidedly encouraging, and she trudged back to the hovel with five shillings. It did not occur to her that she might be robbed, and she probably owed her safety to the fact that no one saw exactly which way she went. She was inclined not to sing on the following night, but she reflected that she would not get so much in future, as her voice would not be a novelty, and she had to remember that they were terribly in arrears with the rent, her mother in need of nourishment, and the winter was coming. And—this was important—she expected to meet Philip!

"I must repay him; it will not do to remain in debt!" she said to herself. But in her heart she vaguely felt that it was not only the propriety of repaying a debt quickly that made her wish to see Philip so soon. She half blushed as she experienced that undefined feeling, a kind of delight at her heart, and she turned her thoughts in other directions.

Somewhat weary after the walk of six miles, Jenny's heart gave a bound of pleasure when she espied the figure of Philip at the spot where he had first seen her.

"I thought that I should find you here!" she cried, and she wondered how it was that she had nearly said "I hoped" instead of "I thought!" "I can repay you for the refreshment yesterday, but"—with a look of intense gratitude—"I can never repay you for your words of encouragement!"

"Perhaps you will be able to do so one day!" he rejoined gaily. His face had been sad till he saw her coming. "You did well yesterday, eh? And there are stylish people at the hotel? Well, sing 'Home Sweet Home' this evening. That always appeals to people!"

He raised his violin to his shoulder and she, narrowly watching him, saw that his left hand was partly crippled so that he

had difficulty in manipulating the strings. Yet he played the song with such effect that the tears came to her eyes.

"I have had no home since my dear mother died," he said softly. "If you feel as I do, you can sing that song in a way that will win favour for you from the people at the hotels. They may be in the midst of luxury and may not miss their grand homes while enjoying themselves at this fashionable seaside town, but the song will touch them all the same. You try it!"

"I should break down!" cried Jenny, with a lump in her throat.

"You mustn't!" he cried energetically. "And you won't if you throw yourself into it and forget everything. Come, let me give you a lesson; sing it as I play!"

He began again, and, after an effort, she followed. He stopped her two or three times in order to correct her where he thought she had not caught the true note or where she had not placed sufficient expression on the words. It was a quaint lesson, but when it was over she felt more confident of her powers. Then they parted and she went to sing to the rich people.

Jenny took up her position and sang "Home Sweet Home" with all the pathos of which she was capable, and she startled her hearers.

All declared themselves delighted, and it became the custom to look for Jenny every evening.

Day after day the girl kept up the practice, trudging backwards and forwards to the town from the sick bed, and bringing home the where-withal to make life less irksome and the winter less to be dreaded. She saw Philip every day and she pitied him for his lot in life and loved him for his generous heart and sterling qualities.

He was the son of poor parents, who had been dead for some years; his father had taught him the violin, and he loved music; he was just getting on well, when he injured his hand and thus his hopes were blighted. His mother had died soon after this, and Philip adopted street playing as a method of gaining a living.

As the days wore on, Jenny left home a little earlier, so that she might spend more time with Philip. He met her outside the town and they walked in together, sweetly conversing. So the old story ran its course and they awoke one evening to the knowledge that they loved.

"I have realised it for the first time this evening, Jenny," said Philip, clasping her in his arms, "because I must leave here!"

"Leave!" echoed Jenny, all the joy dying out of her heart.

"Yes, dearest!" he answered, trying to be gay that she might not be sad, as he always did. "I cannot earn much here, because—well, for various reasons," he added hastily. "So I am going away. I shall travel about and I shall earn money, so that I can come and claim you. You can always write to me at old Peter's, and I will write to you."

"But can I not help you?" she inquired wistfully. "You said I might be able to do so."

"Oh, we could not earn sufficient, you know! But we shall be together soon, never doubt it! You can sing your best to-night, for I shall be listening, and it will be the last time for a while!"

She said nothing, and they journeyed towards the town. Suddenly he stopped and took her hands in his, laying his violin on the ground for that purpose.

"Jenny, you are mine, mine alone! Let me give you this in token of our love!"

He took from his pocket a small ornament—a red stone shaped like a heart, with a little ring or eye of gold at the top through which a chain could be passed.

"I have no chain to give you, and the only chain worthy of being used is a chain of gold!" he said lovingly pressing it into her hand. "Keep it for a token of our betrothal and remember that we belong to one another so long as you retain my heart."

HAVE A PIECE OF MADGE MORRIS' WEDDING CAKE?

Turn to page 677.

He pressed her to his breast and imprinted a kiss on her lips with all the passion of his ardent nature. Jenny returned his embrace with equal fervour.

"It requires no chain to bind us together, Philip!" she cried. "A silken thread will serve."

He folded her in a final embrace, but he did not tell her that he would not see her after the singing; that might have unnerved her. So he listened, and she sang the old song—sang it for him; and then he slipped away.

Jenny looked eagerly for him as she walked away, but could find no trace of her lover. The red heart was placed securely within the bosom of her dress, near her own heart, and she longed to tell him how she loved him before they said "Good-bye." But Philip was gone, and she had to wend her way homeward without a parting word.

She was walking swiftly along the silent road, deep in thought, when she was startled by a rush of feet and she found herself confronted by three men, who demanded her money.

"It's no use saying that you haven't got any," said one of the ruffians with a leer. "We know that you had a haul this evening!"

They seized her and, in mortal terror, she drew out the money and gave it to them.

"This isn't all!" shouted the foremost rascal. "I want more!"

"Then take it!" shouted a voice, and the three men had to release Jenny in order to defend themselves from the vigorous onslaught of two men who had come to the rescue of the girl.

The newcomers were armed with stout sticks, and they laid about them so lustily that, despite the difference in numbers, the robbers thought it good policy to take to their heels.

"Phew!" panted one of the rescuers, a man of over fifty and tolerably stout. "It's a good thing I asked you to come with me and that I haven't quite got out of form. But I'm nearly done up, what with trying to overtake the voice, and then fighting. Oh, my dear, here you are! Not hurt, I hope? They didn't spoil your voice?"

The question seemed so ludicrous that his companion laughed outright, and Jenny was forced to smile through the tears that had welled to her eyes at the loss of her money.

"No, they have not hurt me, but I don't understand!" said Jenny wonderingly. "But they have taken my money and——"

"Bother the money!" snapped the man. "I can give you more, and put you in the way of earning lots, lots! Lloyd, keep still and don't laugh! I want to hear her sing. My dear, I heard the last portion of your song as I came up, and I tell you that you have the voice I've been trying to find for ages, ages!" The little man, in spite of his inclination to portliness, simply danced about the road in his excitement. "As soon as I could understand where the singer was, I came out to find you, because I must have you. Oh, it's no use saying you can't come!" Jenny had said nothing. "I must have you and that settles it! They told me you had gone this way and we followed; Lloyd came also, because these roads are not safe! Now you know!"

"It was very good of you to help me and drive those thieves away, but they got my money unfortunately," said Jenny, rather illogically. "But I must hurry home——"

"Not if I know it!" cried the little man fiercely, planting himself directly in her path. "What! Let you go! Never! Lloyd, come here and help me to stop her!"

Lloyd burst into another fit of laughter, and the little man smiled.

"Of course, I am much agitated, my dear!" he explained. "But here is the whole secret. You have a voice such as I have been trying to find for a long time; with a little training it will be superb. You must join my party and become *prima donna* in a little while. It will bring you lots of money and

fame. Let me hear you sing now, to make sure that I was not mistaken!"

Jenny protested, but the little man spoke to her in a kindly manner, soothing her and listening to her story, crowning all his efforts by forcing a gold coin into her hand to more than replace what she had lost. Jenny at last acquiesced, and sang.

The little impresario's face was a study during that song, could it have been seen distinctly. He was enraptured, and could hardly be persuaded to let Jenny go home on the promise to see him to-morrow at the hotel. It was with the greatest reluctance that he allowed her to depart.

Mr. Lucas Harrison, for that was the name of the impresario, waited with impatience—it might almost be said with feverish anxiety—for Jenny to come to him on the following evening. She had positively declined to come during the day on account of her ragged clothing. The girl appeared in due course and Harrison's brow cleared. There was to be no more singing outside the hotel; she was to intrust herself to the wife of his tenor, Lloyd, and to be under the training of the impresario himself; better clothes were to be provided, and a weekly sum sent to the sick mother to keep her in comparative comfort and pay for the necessary help. Jenny saw visions of happiness in the near future which surpassed her wildest dreams, and she consented.

The operatic company conducted by Mr. Lucas Harrison stayed one week in the fashionable resort, and then left for another part of the country. The girl wrote a glowing letter to Philip, and hoped that he might still be there to call and see her, but he came not. Harrison kept her quite secluded, not allowing her to appear on the boards, but working hard to develop the marvellous powers which he detected in the girl.

For nearly four years the company travelled from place to place in England and on the Continent, and during the whole of that time Jenny never heard one word from Philip; she wrote to him many times, but her letters never reached him apparently. Some came back, marked with the legend that the addressee was not to be found at the address mentioned; she wrote to old Peter, only to learn, weeks afterwards, that he was dead. From the badly-written letter penned by a neighbour, she gleaned the fact that some of her letters had been sent on to Philip's address, the last one they had. That was all, and Jenny hoped against hope that she would see him unexpectedly in the theatre one evening. During the short return visit to England, she sang the old song which she had sung to him, and earned frantic applause. But she knew only that he was not there and that "home" was a thing to be yearned for but impossible of realisation without him. She sang the song from her heart.

"When are we to spend a week in the old place?" she would ask Harrison. He would make a droll grimace and shake his head; there was not enough money to be made in that town—that is, not nearly so much as elsewhere, strange as it might seem.

At last her ardent desire was granted, and the impresario announced that a very good engagement had been offered in the South Coast resort. Jenny clasped her hands in her joy; she felt that she would see Philip.

Her first duty was to visit her mother, now recovered from her illness and spending her days in comfort. Then came the evening of the first concert.

The fame of the company had spread everywhere; they came with a great reputation, and Jenny was the greatest of them all. She was greeted with a storm of applause; some of the audience had seen her in other parts, while some remembered her as she sang in the street four years previously. She sang, and the audience was wild with delight.

"You must go on again, my child!" declared Harrison, jumping about in his excited style. "You must, or they will never leave off clapping!"

She appeared again and sang, but the demands for more were just as great.

"You must give them another!" said the impresario. "After that, they must have somebody else!"

Jenny went to a corner and arranged something in her dress; when she turned, the company saw a red heart, just a little one, hanging from her neck by a silken thread and resting on her bosom. She went on, and sang the old English song. But Philip was not there!

"Is he dead or—has he ceased to love me?" she asked herself. No, he was not dead, she felt certain! "I feel that he is near; I have never had that feeling before! I must find him!"

Her turn in the concert was an early one: she had asked that that it might be so. She slipped away to a dressing room, which was empty, and there she donned a garb which was in strange contrast to the beautiful dress that had graced her lovely figure before the audience. Throwing a rich cloak over this attire, she made her way out.

"It is superstition, Harrison would tell me," she murmured, "but I know it will serve to bring me to him or him to me. The old dress will bring me luck!"

She made her way through the lighted promenade and then into the darker streets; here she took off her cloak and carried it in a roll. She hurried on to the house where old Peter had lived. As she came within a few yards, she started and listened; the strains of a violin fell upon her ears.

"It is he!" she gasped. "Why did he not come to me?" She passed her hand over her brow.

"I will soon test his love, and if it is dead——"

She shivered; then boldly approached the door. Here the tones of the violin became audible once more, and this time the air was "Home, Sweet Home."

"He loves me!" she whispered.

"Philip, it is I, your Jenny!" she cried, entering the room.

Philip, for it was indeed he, dropped the instrument and sprang to his feet. Before him stood the *prima donna* in her gorgeous cloak.

"Away!" he cried feebly. "Such as you are not for me! Forget the past as I have tried to do, and leave me in my——"

"You swore that you would love me and come for me one day!" said Jenny unsteadily. "I have the token of our betrothal. Have you ceased to love me, Philip?"

"No, no!" he cried, at the sound of her pleading tone. "My love is unchanged, but I would not drag you to my level. You are rich, admired! I foresaw it when I had your first letters, and I would not answer. I love you still, but you must give that token back to me and forget me!"

"I cannot! Philip, I cannot! I would rather return to the old life with you! See!" She threw off her cloak, and he saw her in the ragged dress of four years ago, with the little heart resting on her bosom and hanging by its silken thread. "I will come to you as I was four years ago rather than lose you. Philip," she whispered softly, tenderly, as she went up to him, "play the old song, as you were playing it just now, and I will sing it as I sang it on the stage—for you!"

Under the spell of her beauty and intreaties, he picked up the instrument and began to play. As the last notes died away, she stooped and kissed him, for he had sunk into a chair.

"Philip," she whispered, "you encouraged me and helped me when I was in despair! Now that I am able to return it, you must not hesitate to accept."

Philip was a prey to a great inward struggle, but he was conquered when the soft arms incircled his neck.

There was another faint attempt at rebellion on his part. How could he take his place by her side, how could he agree to share her wealth? But she stopped him by a kiss.

"Love levels all!" she whispered again. "If you make me happy, if I cannot be happy without you, then you bring to me something that is worth more than gold."

There was a merry wedding two months later, when Jenny, the celebrated singer, was married to Philip Atwood. Quite a romantic love story, said the gossips; nobody knew exactly what the love story was, but they were sure that it was romantic because no one had ever heard of the husband before, and Harrison said it was romantic!

George Day.

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AN ACROSTIC AND A COINCIDENCE.

***

Also a Meeting on the Bridge.

REGGIE BLAKE was a bank clerk in his working hours, and a poet in his moments of ease. The stern realities of ledgers, pass-books, and trial "balances" had been unable to quell the nascent fire that glowed in his youthful soul, and it was not very long before the local paper of the little town of Baymead began to quiver with Reggie Blake's effusions.

He had been drafted to Baymead from the head office of the bank, and he found life unutterably lonely in the small market town. But for the diversion afforded him by the spinning of rhymes, he told himself he would have drifted into acute melancholia, and whilst this view was perhaps unduly pessimistic, there can be little doubt that existence at Baymead was dull enough after the exhilaration of life in London.

One evening, after a particularly heavy day's work, he was sitting in his dingy little lodging when the maid entered with a letter. The missive was from Mr. Bloxam, the editor of the *Baymead Argus*, and it ran thus—

"MY DEAR SIR.—*I have been much pleased with the poetry that you have been kind enough to contribute to this journal and shall be very glad to receive further metrical contributions whenever you feel inclined to forward the same.—Yours faithfully,*

"JOHN BLOXAM."

"Come, that is a trifle more encouraging," thought Reggie, as he smiled and re-read the communication, "I never could have believed that an editor could write in cold blood to a man and ask for verses. I'll knock off something fresh at once."

Drawing his chair closer to the table, the young man seized a pencil and plunged into thought.

"Now, what can I write about?" he pondered. "'That is the question,' as our friend the melancholy Dane would say."

For nearly twenty minutes he sat with a perplexed look upon his brow, until at length an inspiration darted into his brain.

"By Jove, I have it!" he murmured. "I'll write something to be called "A Face in the Crowd." Brown was saying this morning that every face in a crowd held beauty for some one, and the idea is worth celebrating in verse. Here goes!"

After manifold erasures, alterations, and all the other efforts that go to make up the writing of a poem, Reggie produced the following somewhat feeble effusion, which he flattered himself, however, was "rather good." It ran thus—

"Dear face that looked to mine, and then departed,
O, tell me, shall we ever meet again.
Rich was the joy that thy dear smile imparted,
And thro' my soul thy image beams again.
When on thy charms my raptured fancy ponders,
Entranced I stand in worshipful delight,
Stricken with love my memory vaguely wanders
To that sweet hour when first thou metst my sight.
Wheree'er thou art I send thee this love token
In proof of what my heart would fondly say—
Call me thy knight, thy slave, with faith unbroken,
Kindred in souls though strangers for alway."

"The final line isn't quite clear," he thought after a short interval of reflection, "but it doesn't matter. A touch of vagueness often helps a poem considerably. If people don't understand it, they fancy it must be abnormally clever. I shall let it stand as it is."

Fortified by this brief converse with himself, the poet made a neat copy of the sentimental sonnet and inclosed it to the editor with a short letter, thanking that gentleman for his note. Then he went out and posted the communication, and having returned to his lodging and consumed a frugal supper, betook himself soberly to bed.

* * * * * *

On the following Friday afternoon, the *Baymead Argus* made its appearance, and on column four of the fifth page Reggie Blake's poem, quoted above, was duly published.

It bore his initials at foot, and the young man beamed with delight as he scanned the lines.

"Upon my word, it looks even better than when I first wrote it," he pondered. "It's wonderful how print improves the whole aspect of literary composition!"

Three days passed, and Blake was sitting in his room, hammering out a further poem for the *Argus*, and endeavouring to find a rhyme for the word "cupid," without employing the word "stupid," when the postman's knock resounded through the house, and presently an envelope bearing the handwriting of Mr. Bloxam was handed to the scribe.

"Wonder what he's writing about now?" he murmured, as he tore open the flap, and then Blake's eyes assumed a puzzled expression, for the editor had communicated nothing, but had merely inclosed a letter which was addressed—

"To R. B., author of 'A Face in the Crowd.' c.o. *Baymead Argus*, Baymead."

"Great Scott, it's a girl's hand!" cried Reggie excitably. "Upon my word, this is interesting, and no mistake!"

With trembling fingers he drew forth the letter. It bore the address—"Campion Villa, Baymead," and was in this wise—

"DEAR SIR.—*I fear that I am behaving wrongly in writing to you, and that you will think me a fast and forward girl, but I cannot help thanking you for your really beautiful acrostic on my name. How you came to discover it I do not know, and I am also at a loss to call to mind what crowd it was in which you saw me, for this reason—I have only been to one flower-show, and then, owing to the rain, there was hardly anybody in the grounds. Perhaps, however, you have taken what is called a 'poet's license' in using the title in question, and in any case, let me congratulate you on your beautiful poetry.*

"*Thanking you once more for having selected poor me as the subject of your acrostic—I am, yours very gratefully,*

"DORA WESTWICK."

"*P.S.—Do you ever walk in Campion Park towards twilight? I do sometimes.—D.W.*"

Reggie Blake read the letter half-a-dozen times, and then sat down to think.

"Well, of all the extraordinary misconceptions in the world," he muttered, "this is quite the most wonderful. I haven't written a single acrostic since I was a kid. That sort of poem has gone out of fashion. Anyhow, I'll just acknowledge the note, and pretend to understand it, though for the life of me, I can't make head or tail of this business."

Half an hour later, the following note was on its way to Campion Villa—

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"DEAR MISS WESTWICK.—*Allow me to thank you very sincerely for your kind and appreciative letter. I also walk in Campion Park in the half-light, and shall be there to-morrow evening. If you happen to be on the bridge over the lake at about seven-thirty, I trust I may have the pleasure of seeing you.*

"*I hope that you will not be annoyed by this proposal, and, meantime, remain—Very sincerely yours,*

"REGINALD BLAKE (Author of the Acrostic)."

There was little sleep for our poet that night. He lay upon his couch in a fever of anticipation, asking himself a thousand times what Miss Westwick would be like. Perhaps she was a spectacled old maid, of a sentimental cast of mind, who dabbled in poetry herself. He hoped with all his heart that such might not prove to be the case, and, presently, he fell into a fitful doze, wherein all sorts and conditions of ridiculous dreams concerning his unknown correspondent held the high place.

Next day he contrived to perform his duties at the Bank without perpetrating more than a dozen blunders, and when at length the hours of thraldom were concluded, he rushed home, consumed a hasty meal, arrayed himself in his most gorgeous raiment, and sallied forth to Campion Park, a picturesque little demesne on the borders of the town.

He approached the bridge with swiftly-beating heart. Standing by the parapet was a tall, graceful girl, with wonderful dark eyes and comely cheeks.

Some instinct seemed to rise up in Blake's heart and proclaim to him that this was Dora Westwick, and an instant later he was bowing and holding out his hand—

"Miss Westwick, I think——"

"Yes. That is my name. And you are—Mr.—Mr. Blake. I—I hope you don't think very badly of me for writing!"

To this day Reggie is unable to recount with any degree of exactness what he said and did in the exquisite moments that followed that meeting on the bridge. The girl's beauty took immediate possession of his heart and brain, and when, an hour later, he bade her adieu, he began to think that he was very much in love.

"I suppose I ought to have told her that she was under some misconception as to that acrostic," he reflected as he walked home, "but I was so delighted to find that she wasn't a spectacled old maid after all that the incident passed completely out of my mind. Anyhow, it doesn't matter much one way or the other."

* * * * *

In the weeks that followed, Miss Dora Westwick and Reggie Blake were constantly together, and in the fulness of time he was invited to Campion Villa, where Dora's aunt, a benevolent old lady with whom the girl resided, took an instant fancy to the poetical bank clerk and made him exceedingly welcome.

"I am very, very fond of you literary people, Mr. Blake," she said graciously, "but don't you think you were just a trifle bold when you addressed an acrostic to a young lady to whom you had not been introduced?"

"We poets often do bold things," he replied evasively, "and I think Dora—er—Miss Westwick, I mean, has forgiven me by this time."

"I have," returned Dora promptly, and then changed the subject by offering her admirer some cake.

The inevitable happened in due course. When Reggie Blake was promoted to the position of assistant-cashier, and was notified that a substantial increase in salary would accompany his new dignity, he "took his courage in both hands," as our Gallic friends would say, and asked Dora Westwick to be his wife.

"You know that I have loved you ever since that evening on the bridge?" he said, as he took her hand in his.

Dora pouted deliciously.

"Only since then?" she whispered. "I—I thought it dated from the hour when you saw the 'Face in the Crowd'?"

"Oh, ah, yes, of course," stammered Blake, turning scarlet. "That remark about the bridge was a clerical error, as we say at the bank. But, darling, we can afford to ignore such trifles now, for I—I want you to be my wife."

The hand that lay in Reggie's palm twined lovingly round it, and he knew that he had gained his heart's desire on that summer night.

Throughout the halcyon days of the engagement period that ensued, Reggie Blake had resolved time after time to tell his *fiancée* the truth regarding the poem, but the words died unspoken on his lips, for he could not bring himself to voice the syllables of disillusion, and to inform the girl of his heart that he had written no acrostic in her honour, and that she was under a complete misapprehension in thinking so. In fact, it was not until they had been duly married at Baymead Church, and were enjoying the first days of the honeymoon beside the sea at Jersey, that he found courage to speak.

They were sitting in a remote corner of the pier, hearkening to the strains of the band as it discoursed pleasant melodies from *San Toy*. Presently Reggie observed in a low voice—

"Darling, I want to tell you a secret. I meant to have told you long ago, but somehow I had not the—the courage!"

She looked up with a quick glance.

"A secret?" she echoed. "Nothing very shocking, I hope?"

"Well, it depends entirely on the point of view. To me it seems trivial enough—it may appear otherwise to you."

"Oh, Reg, how mysterious you are! Have you been robbing the bank, or what?"

He laughed lightly.

"No. I haven't aspired yet to criminal honours," he replied, "and my secret has nothing whatever to do with the Bank. It concerns you—and—and the acrostic."

"Me and the acrostic?"

"Yes. Dora, you'll think me all sorts of bad things when I tell you that I have written no acrostic on your name, or on anybody else's. The verses headed 'A Face in the Crowd,' were addressed to an imaginary person."

"An imaginary person? Oh, Reggie, what nonsense! You are only trying to tease me."

"I assure you, dearest, it is the living truth! I was awfully puzzled at the time when you wrote and said that I had composed an acrostic on your name, but you were so—so charming and sweet that I had not the heart to disillusion you."

"But I don't—I can't understand. See, here is the poem. I have carried it in my little purse ever since. Now look at the initial letters of the lines, and see if I am not right."

She handed him the cutting from the *Baymead Argus* as she spoke. Reggie Blake stared at the poem beneath the yellow light of the pier lamp, and then gasped out—

"Great Scott! You *are* right. Well, of all the extraordinary, mysterious, and inexplicable coincidences, this is the most extraordinary, the most mysterious, and the most inexplicable. 'Dora Westwick!' Of course! By Jove, I see it all now, and the mystery is a mystery no longer!"

There was a long pause. Reggie was sitting in amazed wonder, asking himself what unknown power had guided his hand to trace this unconscious acrostic, whilst Dora was regarding him with eyes that held similar astonishment.

"It seems far more like a fairy-tale than real life," she said at length.

He threw his arm round her waist, drawing her nearer to himself.

"Yes," he replied, "just like a fairy-tale, and the good fairies who brought us together were Chance and——"

"And the acrostic," whispered Dora with a satisfied smile.

"God bless the acrostic!" said Reggie fervently, and never was blessing more heart-felt—more sincere.

P. Beaufoy.

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"Provided Always."

The Story of a Will—and a Woman.

"PROVIDED always, and I do hereby declare that if my son, Clement Hugh Heaton, or his issue, lawfully begotten, do not within ten years after my decease, appear in England and claim the said estate called Rexholme, or if my said son Clement Hugh Heaton be dead, and such issue, if more than one, shall die before attaining the age of twenty-one years, then in either of the said events happening, I give the said estate called Rexholme, unto my second son, Jasper Leigh Heaton and his heirs for ever."

The young lawyer laid down the will, in which occurred the above clause, upon the table, and looked steadily across at the gentleman who sat opposite him.

"You see, Mr. Heaton, that it would be a very risky thing for any client of mine to advance you fifteen thousand pounds upon the security of an estate, which, at any time during the remainder of the ten years after your father's death, may be claimed by a child or children of your brother—or, for that matter, by your brother himself, whose death has not been absolutely proved; at least to my satisfaction."

"Then you refuse to negotiate this loan for me?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, on the security of Rexholme. If you have no better than that to offer, I am afraid that you will have some difficulty in raising the money."

"Well, then, give me the deeds of the two estates, Rexholme and Havilands, and, though he will charge me a ruinous interest, I will go to Abrahams to-morrow and get it from him."

"Mr. Heaton," said Robert Morley, "the legal business of your family has been in the hands of our firm for more than three generations. Now, I do not want, just after succeeding my father, to break the link; but if you go to Abrahams, who is more money-lender than lawyer, I give you definitely to understand that I will leave no stone unturned in order to establish the fact of Clement Heaton's being still alive, or at any rate that he married, and has, living to-day, child or children, who inherit his claim to the Rexholme estate."

"The deeds, man, the deeds! As for your threats I treat them as the ravings of a madman."

"Well, sir—there are the deeds—I have no power to withhold them from you. If Mr. Abrahams lends you the money, all I can say is, that the ruinous interest to which you referred, and which he most certainly will exact, will be a tacit admission on his part that the Rexholme title-deeds are undoubtedly bad security."

"Thanks for the opinion. Good-day!"

"One moment, Mr. Heaton. I have this morning received a communication from Richard Dennis, of Rexholme Port, requesting me to ask you for the two years arrears maintenance money, on account of your ward, Elsa Hanbury. As it is your business, and I know nothing whatever about the matter, I beg to hand you the letter, with which, no doubt, you will be able to deal."

"The blundering idiot!" muttered Jasper under his breath; then, with an airy nonchalance, addressing the young lawyer, "didn't you know I had a ward? Oh, yes!—but, thank goodness, she's nearly of age, and then my responsibility ceases. An old friend's daughter!—I will deal with the matter. Good-day, Morley!"

Had Robert Morley seen the scared, evil expression on Jasper Heaton's face as he passed along the passage into Bedford Row, he would have had ample confirmation of certain vague suspicions which had been aroused in his mind in connection with the (practically) threatening letter of Richard Dennis, ex-gamekeeper, and now the shady proprietor of a tenth-rate public-house on Rexholme Quay.

As it was, the thing remained with him, with the result that he determined to pay a visit to Rexholme without delay.

"Reed!" he shouted to a clerk in the outer office, "bring me a Bradshaw!"

"Guv'nor's got something on—bet it's about that black-looking Heaton chap!"

"Oh, Reed!" said Robert Morley, running his finger down the Great Eastern main line departures, "I'm going to Rexholme—may not be back before to-morrow night. Send the boy in a cab to my house for my emergency Gladstone; it's packed ready. And should Mr. Jasper Heaton call during my absence, you know nothing—understand?"

"Very good, sir."

"Tell the boy to take my bag to Liverpool Street; he'll find me in the booking-office."

"My dear Mr. Jasper," he added to himself, "I have long suspected you of underhand dealing; but I rather think that I am now on the verge of discovering you to be at the bottom of a very pretty piece of serious villainy."

* * * * * *

When Robert Morley walked unannounced into his friend Blythe's private office, the Rexholme lawyer welcomed his brother professional with more than ordinary effusion.

"My dear fellow!" he cried, "you could not have come at a more opportune moment—for me!"

"I shall be glad if I can be of any service to you, Blythe; but what is it? I'm down on a bit of important business myself, and don't want to lose more time than I can help in doing it."

"All right, Bob! You know Dennis, old Sir Frederick Heaton's ex-gamekeeper?"

"Yes, yes!—the very man I am come to make some inquiries about."

"No!—well, we'd better have Dobbs in—that drunken old clerk of mine, you know—for once his drinking habits are likely (unless I am very much mistaken) to lead to the righting of a great wrong. We'll have him in, and you shall hear his story."

Touching a bell on his writing-table twice, Mr. Blythe added, "If all he says be true, it's the most extraordinary case of judgment on the wrongdoer that I have ever known. Dobbs, Mr. Morley isn't a stranger to you; I want you to tell us all that you told me this morning."

Dobbs, who even then had the evidence of surreptitious

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refreshment about him, coughed nervously, and nodded to Robert Morley.

He was an undersized, thin man, with wispy grey hair, and a hesitating manner.

"You must let me tell it, gentlemen," he said, "in my own way. While old Sir Frederick was alive, you know, of course, that Mr. Clement and Mr. Jasper quarrelled—what about nobody knew—Whatever it was, it resulted in the elder brother going abroad, to be no more heard of from that day to this. Mr. Clement Heaton has never been seen since.

"Sir Frederick's favourite son, the old gentleman, as you are aware, while feeling almost sure that he was dead, before dying himself, made provision by will, in case Mr. Clement, or any child of his, should be alive, that they should have the Rexholme estate, if claimed within ten years of the testator's death. The ten years is up next month; Mr. Jasper comes into all that he hasn't lost by mortgage, and cent-per-cent loans; which brings me to what looks like the final situation, gentlemen, of the Heaton family mystery. I was coming from the Lamb and Flag hotel late last night, and on my way had to pass the Anchor, Richard Dennis' house. Half way up the narrow lane which runs up one side of it, I saw a man I know—Tully, the messenger at the bank—with his ear glued to the closed shutters of the little side window. The house had been shut a quarter of an hour, but through the two holes at the top came a light which showed that the room had occupants. Tully beckons to me, the moment he spots me, and putting his finger to his lips motions me to listen at the shutters."

"Well, what did you hear?" queried Robert Morley eagerly.

"I'm coming to that, sir. I first raised myself up on the sill, and looking through one of the shutter-holes, saw Mr. Jasper Heaton, and Dick Dennis sitting one on either side the table. I was just in time to hear Dennis say that he wouldn't move a step in the business, unless the two years' money due for the keep of a girl—was paid down on the nail. Mr. Heaton tried to soften Dennis down, protesting that he had no money, but might have some in a day or two, when the claim should be paid."

"Yes, and then?" interrupted Morley.

"Then, sir, Mr. Heaton said the girl was an obstacle; and that if he, Dennis, would help him to remove it, he would make a man of him for life."

"The murderous scoundrel!—well?"

"'You would!' said Dennis. 'Yes,' replied Mr. Jasper, 'I'd give you three thousand pounds!' 'What is it you want me to do?' said Dennis then. 'I have a letter here from a man offering to advance me a large sum of money. The girl is the only obstacle. Should she be taken ill, and die within the next six weeks the money will, on that event being satisfactorily proved, be advanced at once.' Then Dennis said 'What you mean is, if I kill Elsa, I shall have three thousand pounds—I'll have nothing to do with it.'"

"And what did the other villain say then?"

"He reminded Dennis that the death of a fellow gamekeeper, while both were in Sir Frederick Heaton's service, had never been satisfactorily cleared up; adding that he, Jasper, had met him on the night of the occurrence under very suspicious circumstances. 'One murder more or less won't heckle your conscience, man,' he said, 'besides I might say something awkward for you about the first, you know. Dennis then asked when it was to be done. 'Within six weeks,' was the reply. 'Give me another glass of whisky, and I'll do it in six days—six hours, if you like!' Seeing that he had gained his point, Jasper Heaton prepared to depart, just saying that he would call again the following night and arrange everything. Tully and I then thought it time to shift our quarters. This, gentlemen, is true, every word of it; and if you, as I believe you can, will put two and two together, Mr. Jasper Heaton has not only nearly reached the end of his tether, but the 'provided always' of Sir Frederick's will, is likely to come into active operation."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Dobbs," said Robert Morley, gravely, "and you may rest assured that your evidence——"

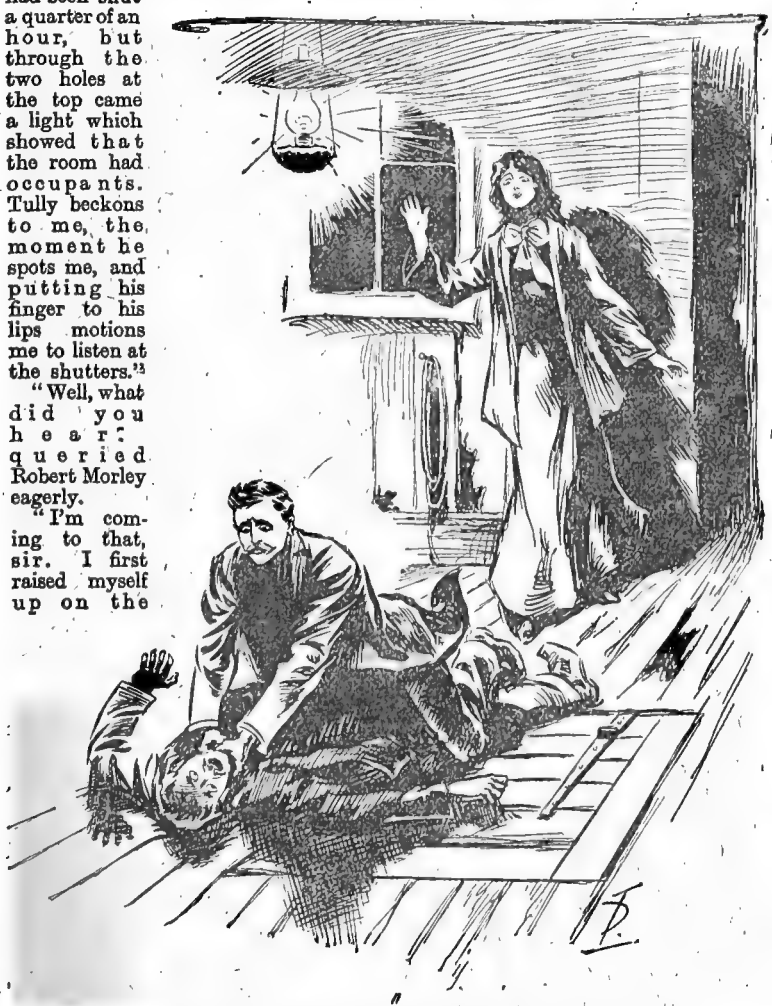
"And Tully's, Mr. Morley."

"And Tully's, Dobbs, will not be forgotten when accounts are balanced."

"One thing I should like to ask you," said Robert Morley to the old clerk. "This girl; this so-called Elsa Hanbury; is she kept in durance by the man Dennis?"

"She must be, sir; for not a soul in Rexholme has ever caught sight of her."

"Then, Blythe, our course is clear. Your business has resolved itself into my business, and the first thing to be done, is to swear out a warrant, on Dobbs' and Tully's testimony, for the arrest of Jasper Heaton on a charge of inciting and conspiring to murder Elsa Hanbury, who, there is every reason to believe, is his brother's child, Clement Heaton's daughter."



Having released the girl he knocked down the would-be murderer and pinned him to the ground.

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"I will attend to that, Bob, and you?"

"I," said his friend, "am going to interview Mr. Richard Dennis; and induce him, if I can, to turn King's evidence; so that no link may be wanting in the chain which is to bind Jasper Heaton for what is to be hoped for society's sake, the rest of his natural life."

* * * *

It was the end of September, and the evenings were drawing in; so that when Robert Morley arrived at the Anchor public-house on the quay, it was nearly dark.

There was no one in the bar except a tall, swarthy-faced woman, of forbidding expression.

To the young lawyer's inquiry if he could see the landlord, she replied that her husband was out.

"Will he be long?"

"I dunno!—p'raps he will—p'raps he won't. Do you want him partic'lar?"

"Yes, I do. If you think he'll be in in an hour, I'll call again."

"You can call if you want to—he may be in; and he mayn't."

"I'll chance it—in an hour."

Wending his way along the silent quay, Robert Morley found himself, in less than half an hour, some distance beyond the outskirts of the place.

The only house in sight was a grey, timber-built windmill, the torn and broken sails of which told of long disuse for corn-grinding purposes.

But for one thing, Robert Morley would have turned his face again towards Rexholme. Desolate and ruinous as was the building, he distinctly made out fully a twinkling star of light above the gallery.

"There surely can't be anyone living there?" he said to himself, "but at the risk of keeping Mr. Dick Dennis waiting, I'll explore a bit."

At that moment a piercing shriek came from the direction where the point of light glimmered.

"Something's wrong!" cried Robert Morley, running towards the mill with all the dash of his Oxford sprinting days.

It did not take him three minutes to reach the door, which he found to be fastened from the inside.

Picking up a short piece of the ironwork of the sails, with which the ground was strewed, he beat upon the crazy barrier of woodwork, until one blow, heavier than the rest, stove in two of the panels above the lock.

Clambering in through the aperture, he found himself in an atmosphere of semi-darkness.

Then, in a recess to the left, he stumbled upon the stairway leading up to the gallery floor of the mill.

It was the work of a minute only to grope his way up the rickety steps, another woman's shriek from above quickening his progress.

Just over his head he could see a dim light coming through a square opening.

Through this opening he sprang into the chamber to see a young girl lying prone on the floor, the grimy hand of Dennis, the black-browed landlord of the Anchor, on the quay, clutching desperately at her white neck.

Another second and Robert Morley would have been too late; but now he rushed across the chamber, seized the would-be murderer by both hands round the throat, and with all his strength pulled him backwards on to the floor, where he knee-pinned him to the verge of suffocation.

Calling to the frightened girl to pass him a length of rope, which hung on a nail by the window, he securely bound his prisoner hand and foot, and rising, turned his attention to the ex-gamekeeper's intended victim.

She looked to be about twenty, small and delicately formed, but with an unearthly pallor, that told a tale of years of shutting-out from the outside world.

Robert Morley's first words were to calm her, and then to debate what was best to be done.

"Do you think you could find your way to the police station in Rexholme?" he asked her, "and tell them to send two or three constables at once."

"Yes—I will go as fast as I can, but you?"

"Oh! I am all right! Besides, I want a little uninterrupted conversation with our friend here. I do not like to ask you to do this, feeling, as you must do, weak and excited with battling with this ruffian."

"Oh, I don't mind—I'm better now."

"One thing more, Miss—well, Miss Hanbury for the present. When you have summoned the police, do not return to Dennis' house, but go direct to lawyer Blythe, two doors from the Lamb and Flag hotel, on the Holme Road—he will look after you—till I have seen you, at any rate."

During the three-quarters of an hour interval, Robert Morley drew from his reluctant captive the whole shameful history of Jasper Heaton's scheme to defraud his elder brother's child of her rights.

It seems, that being determined to make an independence for himself before returning to England, Clement Heaton died on his cattle ranch in Texas, as he was on the point of selling his property. He had married some time before this, his wife having died soon after the birth of her little daughter.

Clement Heaton was just able to make arrangements for his daughter's return to the care of his father, as he supposed, never having heard of Sir Frederick's death.

With the child came the proceeds of the sale of Clement's Texan property, which, meeting his niece at Southampton, Jasper Heaton laid hands on, and used for his own purposes.

The child being only a burden to him, he paid Dennis and his wife a yearly sum to keep her out of the way. This they did, the subsequent inciting by Jasper of Dennis to silence her for ever on the eve of her coming of age, being, of course, already known to Robert Morley.

Jasper Heaton had been arrested in his own house about the same time that Dick Dennis was captured by Robert Morley. The evidence against him, that of his accomplice, of Dobbs, and Tully, the messenger, was overwhelming, and had he not died, two days before the trial of a malignant fever, he would undoubtedly have received the full reward of his crimes.

* * * *

It is pleasant to have to chronicle that Elsa Heaton and Robert Morley have agreed to walk through life side by side.

The impression each formed of the other, on that fateful night in the old windmill chamber, was destined to grow and to intensify, so that though, by reason of Jasper Heaton's criminal extravagance, the estate of Rexholme was much diminished in value, there was yet enough left for the lady of his heart to bestow upon Robert Morley, her knight-errant and best-beloved.

E. Ralph.

THINGS TO NOTE.

Miss Madge . . Morris' Wedding.

(See Page 677.)

How to Win a Gramophone. .

(See Page 682.)

Our New Serial, "The Albert Gate Mystery." . . .

(See Page 702.)

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A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

Which Made all the Difference in the World.

I.

THE following letters appeared consecutively in the *Daily Tatler* for August 24th, 1900:

"*SHOULD WOMEN PROPOSE?*

"SIR,—*The 'Mere Man' who advocated in your columns the liberty of women to make proposals of marriage, has surely never put himself in the position of the man proposed to. I can imagine nothing more ignominious or humiliating than to listen to a woman declaring her heart, and pleading for the honour you will do her by joining your life with hers. Any man in such a situation would look and feel an absolute idiot, but what of the woman who makes the confession? She would be trampling under foot the two prime qualities of womanhood, which I take to be modesty and reserve. No really nice girl, whatever the circumstances or however backward her lover might be, would take the first step in the declaration of love. It must be always the man's prerogative and privilege to propose.—Yours, &c.*, R. T.

"SIR.—*May a mere girl venture to lift her voice against the arguments of a 'Mere Man'? I'm afraid I'm old fashioned, and perhaps not very experienced, but the idea that creatures of my sex should be presented with the right of proposing sends a cold shiver down my back. The notion may appeal to the 'new women' and the 'shrieking sisterhood' generally, but what true girl under any condition would dare or even wish to take such a step? And would men stand being proposed to? My own private opinion is that they would all emigrate to Timbuctoo if ever such a social custom came to prevail. No, Sir, the old order of things is best. My 'Mr. Right' (if there exists such a being) will have to speak first, or no engagement ring will ever glitter on the third left-hand finger of*

MAUD."

II.

IDLY and dreamily Ralph Trevor and his friend Cecil Orchard were sculling down the river. A summer's day had really come at last, and everything that breathed seemed to feel the magic influence of sunshine. To-day for almost the first time this season the Thames could be said to be properly alive.

"Isn't it hot?" remarked Ralph, not for the first time. "What do you say, Cecil, to our running in the boat under that willow, and having a rest till the sun goes down for a bit?"

"I'm your man. I was just thinking what a hard-working day's holiday you were giving me."

With a few skilful strokes the boat was brought alongside the bank, securely moored, and the two young men stretched themselves out, one in the bow, the other at the stern, both the picture of ease and comfort.

"You seem very dreamy this afternoon," said Cecil, when the other had smoked half way through a cigarette without making a remark.

"Do you know what I was thinking? What an infernal thing money is!"

"Dear me! It hadn't struck me in that light before. Now if you had said the shortness of money I might have agreed."

"No, it's the having too much that's worrying me."

"My dear chap, hand it over! I'm dying to relieve you, and short of finding a more worthy recipient."

"Ah, Cecil, you don't understand. I've not too much. It's she."

"She! What 'she'? Some great-aunt of yours who insists on squandering what should some day come to you?"

Ralph Trevor laughed in spite of his somewhat serious mood.

"No, I've no expectations of that kind. Well, I'm in the confessional box this afternoon, and had better tell you everything. The 'she,' Cecil, is the girl I'm in love with, and should like to marry."

Orchard started up from his recumbent position and looked curiously across at his friend.

"Good gracious, Ralph, fancy your being taken that way! I had hoped you had passed the susceptible age and were going to keep me company in my dotage. But tell me all about it!"

Ralph's cigarette had gone out. He lit it afresh and, drawing a cushion more comfortably under his head, continued the conversation.

"There isn't much to relate. You remember I went down to Bournemouth for Whitsuntide, and what a spanking time I told you I had. There was a girl staying at the boarding-house. Her name was Maud Napier. Her people were there, too; they were stopping all through the summer. Cec, I saw her and loved her, almost at first sight. It was as simple an affair as these affairs usually are."

"Well, Ralph?" said his friend sympathetically, when the other paused. Trevor pursued his train of thought.

"And yet it's wretchedly complex. You see she has money—about £160 a year. I've found that out from the Judson's, who know the girl intimately. And I—well, I can look the income-tax man boldly in the face, and truthfully say that I'm not yet taxable. You understand the point, old man?"

"Perfectly, but aren't you a little too sensitive?"

"Surely not! You know how people misunderstand one in a case like this. They would say it was her money I was after, and not the girl herself. One hundred and sixty pounds a year of her own—ah, that young man knows which side his bread is buttered! You can fancy that being said, Cec?"

"I can, but why mind the world?"

"I shouldn't, if the girl herself understood my motive. But would she? If she hadn't that money, it would be all right. I could speak out at once, tell her all about my position and prospects, and be refused or accepted, as the case might be. Oh, it's a queer position to be in!"

For some moments the two friends smoked in silence, the only sound being the quiet lapping of the water against the keel. Trevor had gone off into a brown study, which Orchard was too sympathetic to interrupt. A fish jumping out of the river near at hand caused a temporary diversion.

"A lively one, eh, Cecil? Well, shall we be moving on?"

"If you're ready! Made up your mind how to act about the girl, Ralph?"

"I'm going down to Bournemouth for August Bank Holiday. What will happen there I don't know. Destiny principally directs one in an affair of this kind."

"May it be a good destiny, old man! One thing I'd say to you. Don't let the girl suffer because you don't speak—that's where timidity on the man's part very often leads. There, you didn't think I knew so much about human nature, did you?"

"No, but I thought you knew more about a boat. You are trying to shove her off without unloosing the painter."

Both laughed heartily, and, as they rowed away, conversation drifted to lighter matters.

III.

An evening concert was in progress at the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth. The big glass pavilion was crowded, and upstairs in the gallery promenading was a matter of difficulty. Visitors and residents had alike turned out on this August Bank Holiday in quite exceptional numbers.

Maud Napier had eagerly accepted Ralph Trevor's invitation to accompany him to the concert.

"You'll be surprised," she had said, "but, though we have been a long time here, I've only been to a concert once before. My people don't care for music, you know."

"And do you?"

"Passionately. It just lands me in heaven!"

They had arrived some twenty minutes before the music commenced, and had secured a couple of seats in a position from which the vocalists could be clearly heard and seen. Never had Ralph felt so happy as to-night, and yet with the happiness were mingled feelings of uncertainty and unrest. He knew his own heart clearly, absolutely; if only he might know too the heart of the girl at his side!

For a while she seemed absorbed in the music, scarcely giving heed to her companion. The orchestra rose to the size of the audience, and played as though it meant to enhance its already great reputation. Maud was enthusiastic; Trevor caught the glow of her enthusiasm, and between the various items on the programme they fell to discussing warmly the points of appreciation. How many tastes they had in common! The girl's face lit up with the enjoyment she was feeling, and almost against his will Ralph found himself again and again looking into her eyes.

"One more song, and then the interval!" she said. "Shall we go outside for a little then?"

"If you like, and won't catch cold."

"Oh, I shan't do that! We can get our seats again?"

"Yes, I've the counterfoils of the tickets. It is hot in here, and I shall be glad of a breath of fresh air. Ah, here comes the singer!"

It was the "Jewel Song" from "Faust," sung superbly by a lady who, though not of great reputation, had clearly considerable knowledge of the stage business and took the trouble to realise, even though it was only on a concert platform, the character of Margaret. She was recalled again and again, but wisely refused to spoil the effect of complying with the calls for an encore.

"That was too lovely for words," said Miss Napier, when the applause had finally subsided.

Trevor glanced closely at her; there was strong emotion in the accents of her voice. If only he were less diffident in speaking, surely it would not be hard to win a girl with such sensitive feelings.

"We'll go outside then now. You'll put on your cloak?"

"I suppose I'd better. Thank you very much!"

Ralph's hand trembled a little as he adjusted the cloak around her.

"I'd turn the collar up," he suggested.

It was a simple remark, but something in the voice made her look into his face. It was very pale, and there was a queer haunting expression in his eyes. As they passed out together, their shoulders accidentally brushed one another. A new and tremendous knowledge for which Maud had been groping thrilled her from head to foot.

As for Trevor, he moved like a man in a dream. Unconsciously their steps took one of the more obscure paths where two only could walk abreast, and in a minute they found themselves away from the bright lights of the pavilion, away from the chattering crowd, along with the magic and rapture of thoughts that were far too deep for immediate words. Ralph was tongue-tied. Fearful of disappointment, he could not put the great, great question hanging on his lips. It was the girl who spoke first.

"Do you mind if we sit down on this seat. I am tired."

It was true. The gust of personal felings which she had never experienced before took much of the strength out of her.

They sat down under the shadow of the shrubs. A slip of the moon just showed through an opening above. It was the very night for intimate confession, and yet through pride and timidity Trevor seemed likely to let the golden chance go by.

In that brief glance before they left the building Maud had read him like a book. She was always a girl of intuitions, and she could trust them. Yes, she was loved, and the note from her own heart was no echo but a responsive voice. She had been offered love twice before—in very plain words too—but she had never felt like this, though nothing had been said. Dare she reply to a question that was not openly put? Surely, surely, if the reason at which she guessed prevented Trevor from speaking!

"You looked very strange just now," she said slowly. "I think I understand. I know you so well and—words aren't always necessary, are they? There!"

She put out her hand. He took it, and at last the words came.

"Maud, I can tell you now. I love you, dear."

"And I you, as you know. Did it matter my speaking first? Love was so mutual, Ralph, wasn't it?"

And they sealed that matter of mutual affinity in the usual way.

* * * * * * *

Three months after the date of their engagement Maud was spending one Saturday afternoon with Trevor in his home looking over some of his treasures.

"Oh, you keep a newspaper cutting book!" she observed. "How interesting!"

"Yes, I once had a mania for writing to papers."

"What's this? A lot of letters on 'Should Women Propose?' I seem to remember——"

"They're silly, Maud. Pass on!"

"Wait a moment! Is this yours, signed R. T.?"

"Yes, that's mine!"

Her eyes scanned it, and travelled to the next.

"How funny, Ralph; why, the next one is by me!"

"You? You were that Maud?"

"I *was* that Maud. I'm not now. Oh, how stupid and childish it reads. Don't circumstances change one's opinions?"

"They certainly do. Let me see what you wrote!"

Their heads bent together over the page. They raised them simultaneously, and she looked him roguishly in the eyes.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed, "I'm wearing an engagement ring" (she touched it lovingly) "and you didn't speak first, did you, Ralph?"

Herbert Jamieson.

Extremely Silly.

CLARA: "Well, dear, I am going to marry the Earl of Broadstairs." Maud: "Then, what are you looking so glum about it for?" Clara: "I am afraid my *fiancé* won't like it. Men are so silly."

Girls Will be Girls.

ADELINE: "What would you do if you were in my shoes?" Madge (after a glance at them): "Get a pair about four times smaller."

A Good Reason.

"HULLO, Jones, what are you doing with your coat buttoned up to your chin? Are you ill?" Jones: "Hush; don't mention it. I have on a tie that my wife chose."

One Thing She Hadn't Seen.

"AND now," said the country cousin to the City girl, "I have shown you everything on the farm." "Oh, George, you haven't done any such thing. Why, I heard father say before I started that you had a mortgage on it that covered nine-tenths of the ground."

Papa Forgot Himself.

LITTLE NELL: "I don't like my papa one bit. He's awful selfish." Mamma: "Is he?" Little Nell: "Yes. He nearly sat down on my dollie, an' then, instead of takin' another chair, he took her chair right away from her, an' left her on the hard floor."

Thought She Was Qualified.

MRS. DE JAR: "Is there an idiot asylum near here?" Mr. De Jar: "I believe so." "Do they take people on their own recommendation?" "My stars! How should I know? Why?" "Oh, nothing, only to-day I got hold of a package of my old love-letters."

The Lion and the Carrot.

A YOUNG married lady was explaining the difference between silver and electro to a small domestic, and said: "Mary, you will always find a 'lion' on anything that is real silver." "Yes, mum," said Mary, "I'll remember, and I've heard say as there is always carrots on gold, though I ain't seen them."

What She Said.

CLARA: "Oh, I am so glad to see you! I have some good news." Maud: "What can it be? A proposal?" Clara: "Yes. But you don't know who it's from." Maud: "Let me see. Why, it must be from—from——" Clara: "Charlie Haskins." Maud (hiding her surprise): "Oh, yes, of course. What did he say, dear?" Clara: "Oh, he was so nice. He began by declaring that he had always thought of me." Maud: "Then—he was sitting in the chair, wasn't he? He moved over to the sofa and took your hand in both of his, and told you how he had gradually learnt to love you, and remarked incidentally that he thought that kind of love was the more lasting." Clara: "Why, so he did!" Maud: "Then he was silent for a time, and finally said you must excuse him, but he was so overcome by his emotions. Then his arm slipped round your waist, and he said you were the only girl he had ever cared for in his whole life, adding he could not live without you. No, no, that would be impossible. And would you not say just the one little word that would make him, oh, so happy?" Clara: Well, I don't see how you know, but it was something like that." Maud: "And what was your answer?" Clara (beaming): "Why, dear, what would you have said?" Maud: "I said no."

A Very Different Colour.

"I SUPPOSE the baby is a delicate pink—eh, Smith?" Smith: "No. He's a robust yeller."

Not Always Thus.

TRAMP: "Madam, I was not always thus." Madam: "No. It was your other arm you had in a sling this morning."

Couldn't Master Those.

WICKERS: "They tell me, professor, that you have mastered all the modern tongues." Professor: "All but two—my wife's and her mother's."

Two Birds.

HE: "Will you marry me?" She: "No." He: "Then will you marry Harry Sawyer? He wanted me to ask you for him, too, while I was about it."

Bertha was Cautious.

BERTHA: "Grandma, is oor teef good?" Grandma: "No, darling; I've got none now, unfortunately." Bertha: "Then I'll give oo my nuts to mind till I come back."

No Family Likeness.

"AND are you the captain's boy?" asked the old lady on deck. "Yes'm," he replied. "Well, you don't look like him at all," she said, "and I never would have believed it."

Willie's Ambition.

"WILLIE," said the visitor, "what is your ambition?" "I'd like," said the boy, putting down his yellow-covered story of the plains, "to have people tremble like leaves at the mere mention of my name."

Wasted Sympathy.

"AND that is your answer?" "It is. But I hope my refusal will not cause you unhappiness, Mr. Perkins." "No, indeed. Smith said you'd snap up the first man that offered himself, and I bet him you wouldn't. I'm a box of cigars ahead."

A Source of Income.

MINISTER'S WIFE: "I think it is perfectly scandalous the Widow Bentley marrying again, and for the fourth time. Don't you think so, my dear?" Minister: "Well, it would hardly be right for me to say anything against Mrs. Bentley, my dear; she has been too good a customer of mine."

Diplomatic Wickwire.

MRS. WICKWIRE: "From the happy expression you had when Mrs. Potts was singing, one might imagine that you enjoyed that sort of thing. You don't break out into happy smiles over my singing." Mr. Wickwire: "I wasn't smiling over her singing. I was just thinking how lucky I was that she belonged to Potts instead of to myself."

Perfectly Safe.

THEY were standing at the front gate. "Won't you come into the parlour and sit a little while, Georgie, dear?" "N-no, I think not," replied Georgie hesitatingly. "I wish you would," the girl went on; "it's so awfully lonely. Mother has gone out, and father is upstairs groaning with rheumatism in the legs." "Both legs?" asked George. "Yes, both legs." "Then I'll come in."

Excellent References.

A MAN who looked extremely suspicious applied at a boarding-house for a home, and was received by the landlady. "I presume," she said, after inspecting him critically and hearing what he had to say, "that you can give references?" "What kind do you wish, madam?" he inquired with a smile. "Well," she hesitated, "I don't know who you are, and I would like something in the way of a recommendation." "All I can offer, madam," he said, pulling out some papers, "are here; they are receipted bills from every landlady I ever boarded with, up to date, as you will observe." Her face brightened. "Oh," she exclaimed, "that will do. You can have anything in the house you want."

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The Parting of the Ways.

A Pathetic Little Love Incident.

BERTHA, standing at the window of the room, held a seashell to her ear. By her on a table was a vase, a seagull with wings curved curiously under, for the holding of flowers. Her left hand rested on the gull.

At the back of the room among a laughing crowd sat Ernest. He was busily engaged in drawing caricatures.

A young girl drew near to Bertha.

"Why do you hold the shell to your ear so long?" she asked.

"I am listening," she explained, "to the sound of the sea. No matter how far inland you take it, a shell like this sings of the sea. It is like the soul singing of eternity."

"Bertha, Bertha!" voices came calling from the other end of the room. "Come. Have your caricature drawn. Look. Such ears, such noses, such mouths! Stand still for yours. There, Ernest, she is posing. Commence."

Ernest took a fresh sheet of paper. He sharpened his pencil to a point.

"A little this way," he commanded. "Now." And he scratched it swiftly over the paper, drawing.

The others gathered round him, some kneeling by his side, others leaning over.

"Splendid!" they cried. "Oh, Bertha, if you could only see! It is worse than ours. Those eyes!"

They laughed convulsively, one girl until she coughed.

By and by Ernest, rising, presented the picture to Bertha with an elaborate bow in which the slim white fingers grotesquely swept the floor.

She looked at the sketch a moment, frowned almost imperceptibly, and laid it back on the table.

Ernest reached out his hand for it.

"Shall I tear it up?" he asked.

"No," replied Bertha. "Leave it there. I want it for future reference."

The chill of her manner fell upon the rest. They dispersed in twos and threes, some going into the drawing-room, where they played duets and sang snatches of song, others to the little parlour glimmering through the width of open doors, and the two were left alone.

"I have offended you," said Ernest; adding, "It seems to me that lately I am always offending you."

"It is hardly your fault," she returned gently. "It is the fault of our natures; that is all. They clash."

"Sit here," he begged, pushing forward a chair, "and let us talk about it."

She sat down and idly took up the caricature. He, opposite, watched her face as she studied it.

"And this is how you see me," she mused. "There is something abnormal about it. The artist nature is perforce peculiar, else it would not be an artist. It is almost impossible. The nature of the caricaturist is impossible. To see people and things so distorted suggests distortion in the one who sees. It is as if your mind were a twisted X-ray which fantastically reveals the skeleton."

Leaning back in the armchair he had taken, he regarded her out of amused eyes.

"Go on," he insisted. "Don't spare my feelings."

He said it laughingly, but there was a cynical look about his mouth that she had got to know.

"The picture is as I shall look ten years hence," she went on. "If you are always to see me ten years older than I am, all the saints and angels protect me! Such foresight is rife for the breeding of unhappiness."

"You cross bridges before you get to them, Bertha. You borrow trouble."

"Sometimes it is just as well, Ernest."

"Yes."

"We shall never be happy together."

"If it was the drawing of the picture, Bertha, that was a little thing. Let me tear it up and let it be as if it had never been drawn. Will you?"

"Life is made up of little things. They are the straws that show the way the wind is blowing. No; don't tear it up. I want it for future reference, as I said. I want to be reminded by it that if I should be married to you not only my face but my every action would be distorted thus."

"No, no!"

"Yes. And that is not all. We are too alike for happiness. Both sensitive as flowers, both jealous. We quarrel now; we would quarrel then. After marriage the making up is not so sweet as before. It grows monotonous, and then come the sleepless nights and the tears—the tears. Already with me they have commenced. The night you kissed Mabel I waked at four o'clock and never closed my eyes again. I lay still, half heartbroken, watching the pattern of the paper on the wall grow out of dimness and take to itself its old fantastic shape in the light of the dawn."

"Mabel is hardly seventeen. She is only a child."

"Children grow to be women, and soon. Suppose we were married and two years from now she came to our house and you kissed her again."

She tapped trembling fingers on the arm of her chair.

"I should die of it," she faltered.

He drew up his chair nearer and, taking the trembling fingers in his own, he caressed them.

"Somewhere or other in Grimm's fairy tales," he said, "there is just this sort of story. Isn't there a girl who goes down in the cellar and sits there weeping because some day she might marry and the storks might bring her a little child, and the little child might fall down the steps to that cellarway and break its leg?"

"It is only when you love a man," she continued to muse, following up her own train of thought, "that you lose the blessed sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care."

"Didn't I come to you early the next morning and comfort you, Bertha?"

"Her kiss was on your lips," she answered.

With a shrug of his shoulders he laughed.

"You are ridiculous," he affirmed.

"Once you were mine," she resumed, as if he had not spoken, "I should want you to be all mine. So far as I have been able to judge, no man ever belonged solely to one woman. Therefore, since the thing is impossible, it is best to tear ourselves apart before it is too late."

He dropped her fingers.

"You speak very coldly of tearing ourselves apart, Bertha," he complained.

"I am not cold, but I scent unhappiness. Living alone is a negative unhappiness. Living together would be positive."

After a pause, she continued—

"Besides, I am a rover. Already I have stayed in this one place too long. I begin to grow restless again."

"If you put your head on my shoulder a little while, wouldn't that take away your restlessness?"

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"For a little while, perhaps; but it would return, and then I should have to go back again to my Mother Nature for comfort. She comforts with flowers, with dew, with soft, sweet breezes, but most of all with the sea. The moan of it, the sob, the sometime sigh; its lights—rose lights, white lights, soft, mellow lights of the setting sun—drifting while you look into the silver shimmer of a crescent moon. I long for the sea."

"Bertha, you make me sad, as sad, sitting there, as if you were alone, longing for the sea. You are not alone, my sweetheart. I am here."

She regarded him with a gaze that seemed not to see him.

"For months I have studied you," she began. "You have given me much happiness, but more unhappiness. If you had not overbalanced the happiness with the unhappiness you would not have been a man."

There came a look about his mouth which was like that of a hurt child. She had grown to know that also.

"You have many lovable qualities," she soothed, "but with the exaggeration of the artistic temperament you possess an exaggerated power to hurt. This you make use of frequently. My life with you would be part ecstatic happiness and part acute despair. And the despair, I am afraid, would far outweigh the happiness."

The snatches of song drifted from the drawing-room in upon the silence which had fallen between them.

"Alone we come into the world," she said slowly, "and alone we go out of it. But I, it seems, am one of those creatures born only to live alone from the cradle to the grave. I wish to be the only one. Few women in this old world have that happiness. I can hardly dare to hope that it will be meted out to me."

"You are the only one with me now, Bertha."

"Now!" she repeated. "The 'now' is characteristic. I am your girl while the summer lasts, but there are winters to come and other summer times. How will it be then? Others came before me. Others will follow."

He shook his head in dissent.

"I know your nature," she averred. "It is summed up in one word—'artist.' There are many synonyms for the word—volatile, ephemeral, vacillating, irresolute, weak. But the one word suffices. To turn it into an adjective you are artist and that describes you."

He rose.

"I will go," he said, "and come back by this way again when you are in better humour."

"If you are wise," said she, rising also, "you will never come back."

He stopped short.

"Do you mean that, Bertha?" he questioned, the words coming distinctly clear with a touch of infinite sadness.

"I mean it," asserted she.

He made a step forward.

"Will you kiss me good-bye, then?" he asked.

"If I kissed you I should want to keep you, and I am very sure that it is best for you to go."

He walked through the room out into the hall to the door. He put his hand on the knob and looked back at her. Though her face had paled to the whiteness of her gown she made no effort to recall him. He turned the knob and went out. The door shut on him.

She started forward with a sharp, quick cry as if she would have opened the door. Then, clasping one hand to her heart, she caught up the sea-shell and held it close to her ear, listening.

The group at the piano, rushing laughingly in, found her standing motionless as the statue of a woman with the shell to her ear.

"Are you still listening to the sound of the sea, Bertha?" they asked.

"Still listening," she answered, "to the sound of the sea."

"But why," they queried, "are your eyes so sad?"

"They look on life," she answered, "and life is sad."

Z. A. Norris.

Your Editor Chats.

THIS week I have received the following letter from a Glasgow reader:

"In introducing 'How I Chaperoned Belinda' you tell us that we are to learn how men of honourable names use the basest means to force a young woman into marriage, because she is the heiress to great wealth. Now, seeing that the law in no way forces a woman to share her wealth with her husband, and that the law also allows a woman to abandon her husband (either with or without cause) at any moment she pleases, and, further, that the law compels a man to support his wife, no matter how rich that wife herself may be, does it not seem absurd to expect intelligent people to take an interest in the so-called 'revelations'? Had you given us some accounts of the base means used by women to ensnare a wealthy young man into marriage they would no doubt have been worth reading, as, in that case, they need not have been ridiculous."

I am glad to have an opportunity of clearing up this point, which may have occurred to many other readers. What my correspondent says concerning a married woman is undoubtedly correct. She has the control of her money and can claim her liberty at will—if she has the courage. I must point out, however, that the series of articles criticised deal not with a married woman, but with an inexperienced unmarried girl of seventeen. A girl of that age, with but a limited knowledge of the world, is not likely to have as keen a grasp of the law as my Glasgow friend appears to think. Certainly we never met one with so exhaustive a comprehension of the Married Women's Property Act!

The case of Belinda is, unfortunately, a typical one. Every year men of wealth, but of plebeian origin, on this and the other side of the Atlantic, procure titled husbands for their daughters. The fact is palpable—refer to the list of fashionable marriages. How often this is done against the daughter's inclination it is our purpose to show. The bargain is concluded in hard cash, the title is bought for so many thousands down, and the girl is handed over to the tender mercies of the husband her father's wealth has bought. Once married she can, of course, leave that husband when she likes. But how few young girls have the knowledge or the courage necessary to take a step that invariably incurs the odium of Society! Surely prevention is better than cure, and it is in the hope that in calling attention to this matrimonial sale and barter we may quicken public feeling against it, that we have decided to set forth the facts contained in Lady Peggy Carstairs' revelations.

I am always delighted to receive criticisms of any of the stories that appear in this little paper, whether such criticisms are favourable or otherwise, and I am delighted to be able to say that all those letters I have received concerning the opening chapters of "How I Chaperoned Belinda" (with the one exception above) express the great appreciation that readers feel concerning them. One correspondent in particular, who seems to know what he is talking about, says:

"I like David Carr already, for I think him a rattling good Britisher, and I do not think Lady Peggy will get rid of him so quickly as she thinks. A man's true love in the middle classes is not so easily brushed aside as it is in the 'smart set.' David's personation to get near his love is remarkably witty, and Honoria being embraced by the Egyptian is just as it should be, and, in my opinion, could not be nearer the truth. Being a Customs House officer myself, I have a lot of dealings with big passenger boats, and I have heard and seen enough to convince me that all Lady Peggy is writing is genuine."

YOUR EDITOR.

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By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken at Sydenham, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

Cathie informs him of her belief that Guy Despard is in the plot, and insinuates that his own wife, being a friend of the Despards, is possibly implicated.

That night her fears for his safety are shown to be well founded. For in the middle of the night the alarm bell is violently rung, and as Ilden opens his door to ascertain the cause, an attempt is made to stab him. Ilden immediately gives chase to his would-be murderer, and, catching him, throws him down, and is half-strangling him when Grant appears with a light, the rays of which show Ilden's captive to be none other than his cousin Percival. Percival, however, declares that he saw Despard entering Ilden's room and thought he was stabbing at him.

A search is made and Despard is discovered. He is locked in a cellar till he can be handed to the police in the morning, but someone lets him out during the night. Next day Ilden leaves the Hall to make inquiries regarding Despard at Lallerton, and finds that Despard has been there before him and knows of Lady Ilden's assumed name of Mrs. George and her hiding place at Sydenham.

He immediately changes his plans and hurries to Sydenham, only to find that Florence has gone, no one knows whither.

It appears that shortly after Ilden had left his wife to go to Pennybrook, a girl had called on Florence, and had asked her to go to the death-bed of her friend, Miss Despard, who was living close by. While gazing at her unconscious friend, the maid had made the astonishing announcement that Lord Ilden was not Florence's husband, but the husband of the dying Miss Despard. Unable to realise the import of the words, Florence had simply replied, "Lord Ilden is *my* husband."

(*The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.*)

"He is My Husband!"

SHE spoke the words bravely in spite of the terrible fear clutching at her heart, the fear that she would not allow herself to realise.

The maid changed colour at this open expression of disbelief.

"If he is your husband, then it is funny that he should want you to live with him here under a false name," she said mercilessly, and Florence made no answer.

She could not explain to this girl, but of course the explanation was a full and satisfactory one for herself. She tried to deafen her ears to the mocking voice that said it was not. There had seemed something unreal and impossible in the plot against her husband all along.

What, said the voice, if it were only a pretence, intended to make her agree to a secret marriage, hurried on without any introduction to her husband's friends—any acknowledgment by them of the tie?

For the moment she had lost consciousness of the silent figure on the bed, and she started, every nerve quivering, as a faint but perfectly articulate call came from it.

"Clara!"

The maid was bending over her mistress instantly.

"Yes, miss, I am here."

"Is Mr. Guy here?" asked the voice, weakly.

"No, miss, he was here this afternoon, but he has gone away again.

"I heard you talking. I suppose that it is nurse."

Florence came forward, her heart beating violently at the thought that the moment of perfect consciousness which the doctor had anticipated had come.

"It is I, Florrie," she said, her voice trembling, and the dying girl smiled faintly, as their lips met.

"Poor Florrie," she said softly, "I am so sorry! But I hope that he really loves you, and I shall not stand in your way now. I felt very bitter just at first, when I saw your name in the paper; but I felt that you could not know, and I suppose he never loved me really, although I have trusted him all through."

The words came slowly and with an effort, and Florence seemed to hold her breath listening. The name she dreaded to hear had not yet passed the dying woman's lips.

She had paused as if to collect her thoughts.

"I am sorry that Guy is not here," she went on, even more feebly. "I should have liked to have told him. It cannot matter to George, or affect his prospects, now that I am dying; and it might make poor Guy less bitter against him if he knew that we were really married. I told him a lie to please George. I should like you to tell Guy if you see him, and tell him that I want him to forgive Lord Ilden. He must put away this terrible idea of taking his life. You will urge him for yourself, will you not, to put away these thoughts of revenge, although Lord Ilden has injured you too? You would not have Guy injure him?"

She paused for an answer, and Florence's voice came almost as low and faint as hers.

"No, I love him."

"Then you will not tell Guy where he is? He has sworn that when he sees him he will take his life. You will not tell him?"

The heart of her listener gave a great throb. Suddenly, as in a flash, it came to her that it was Guy Despard who had been waiting outside the lighted window of the inn at Witterby. He had been at Pennybrook when Ilden's life had been attempted in the coppice. It was because she had told him where his enemy was that he had gone away without waiting for his sister to recover consciousness, hoping that he could come back to her with news that he had taken the life of the man who had broken her heart.

"You will not tell him?" the dying woman urged again, as she remained silent, paralysed by the thoughts which crowded into her mind. "George has injured you deeply, I know. I suppose that he must be cruel and unfair, although it is so hard to think it. I have had bitter moments after I saw the announcement of his marriage, when I have felt as though it would be right for him to die. I thought of him breaking your heart as he has broken mine, and I almost felt that Guy was right. But it is for God to avenge, not man, and I only pray now that poor Guy may not find him."

Florence's voice, harsh and strained, interrupted her.

"It is too late. I have told your brother where Lord Ilden is."

But even the tragedy in her voice seemed unable to shadow the tired serenity of the girl who lay dying.

Her eyes had closed wearily.

"Poor George!" she murmured drowsily, and after a pause, "Poor Guy!"

They were her last words.

Florence had fallen on her knees by the side of the bed, and she seemed to awake from semi-unconsciousness to find the doctor and nurse in the room. The latter was speaking to her.

"She is gone, poor dear, and no grieving can bring her back."

Florence rose to her feet unsteadily; but her thoughts were not of the tragedy of death which had taken place before her eyes so much as of the tragedy of the living in which she had unconsciously played such an important part.

Guy Despard was on his way to Pennybrook to kill George. She could not doubt it. For what other reason would he have left the death-bed of the sister to whom he was devoted? Despard was on his way to kill George, and it was she who had betrayed the latter to his enemy.

He had deceived her, perhaps. She could not think clearly of that. Daisy had said that he was not her husband. But whatever he was or had done she loved him, and she had betrayed him. It was for her to save him. Her mind held no other thought.

Already she was losing valuable time when she ought to have been following him to Pennybrook, and she only waited to bid a silent, tearless farewell to the silent figure of the girl she had loved as a sister, before leaving the house to begin her journey.

A feverish impatience possessed her now, and she made her way direct to the station without even returning to the house in the next avenue which had been her home, and which she realised vaguely would never be her home again.

Florence Visits Pennybrook.

THE night that at Pennybrook Hall was disturbed by the capture of Guy Despard was spent by poor Lady Ilden at a York Hotel. She had advanced that far on her journey only to find that the last train even for Rickerby had gone, and she had spent the night without sleep, only waiting till the morning should come to make the continuation of her journey possible.

The interruption had come as a great blow to her, killing the hope that had made her journey to the North one long fever of impatience.

When she went on in the morning it was with a dull hopelessness, a feeling that Fate had been unkind and that she was doomed to be too late.

It was a pale, pathetic ghost of the happy girl-wife of Sydenham who reached Pennybrook at last, barely fifteen minutes, had she known it, after Ilden had started on his disturbing visit to Lallerton. Only fifteen minutes that might have made everything so different, which might even have averted the final tragedy.

Catherine Hay had barely returned to the Hall after seeing George off at the station when Florence approached the house, the terrible foreboding in her heart quickened almost to a certainty by the sight of the drawn blinds. Somebody was dead at the Hall. Who could it be but George? She had come too late to warn him. And he had been all the world to her. It held nothing but him.

She hesitated uncertainly in dread of the confirmation of her fears which must meet her when she reached the house and made her inquiries, but her trembling limbs carried her on.

Wardle, the old butler, answered her timid ring, and was not a little exercised in his mind as to who the beautiful girl could be whose white face seemed in a way familiar, and who inquired so timidly whether Lord Ilden was at the Hall.

She stared at him with a strange incredulity when he said that his lordship had left the house half an hour earlier, as if she suspected him of a wilful attempt to deceive her.

"But the blinds are drawn. Somebody is dead," she said.

"Yes, ma'am, Mr. Rupert, the master's brother."

She remembered for the first time since she left Sydenham, that it was to see his uncle, who was ill, that George had left her. If he had deceived her, this at least was true. Her heart leapt to know that the mocking voice had for once been wrong. At Sydenham by Daisy Despard's death-bed it had suggested that this was an excuse he had made for deserting her.

"And can you tell me where he has gone?" she asked.

Wardle could not say. He would inquire,

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and he was asking her into the hall to wait when she stopped him with another anxious question.

"Do you know whether a Mr. Despard has been here to see Lord Ilden either last night or this morning."

The butler's face changed instantly. His master had just been announcing that he would give a reward of twenty pounds to the person who recaptured this Despard or the accomplice who had unbolted his prison door.

"Yes, ma'am," he said diplomatically, "may I ask whether you are a friend of Mr. Despard's?"

She was answering in the affirmative, leaping at the hope that she might meet her friend's brother and turn him from his purpose, when a girl of about her own age came forward from the hall, her naturally pleasant face clouded with angry suspicion.

Catherine had been passing through the hall and overheard what had passed. Here was a friend, probably an accomplice of the man who threatened her cousin's life, who evidently had not yet heard that the identity of her ally had been discovered. The opportunity of obtaining damaging admissions from her was not to be lost, and she disappointed Wardle, who had been thinking exactly the same thing, by taking the matter into her own hands.

"If you will come in," she said trying to keep the suspicion and hostility which stirred her out of her voice, "I can give you any information you want about Mr. Despard and Lord Ilden. You can wait here, Wardle."

She was leading the way to a little room opening from the hall, and felt safer for the presence of the old butler outside. The accomplice of a man like Despard might be dangerous.

But even to Catherine the precaution seemed a little absurd when she was able to observe her visitor clearly. This graceful girl, with her beautiful and anxious face, was as different as she could be from the typical desperado. Her big violet eyes were so pathetic in their questioning anxiety that Cathie found it difficult to steel her heart against her. But the suspicion that these same violet eyes had clouded her cousin's judgment made her voice cold.

"You are a friend of Mr. Despard's, I think you said. May I ask why you inquire for him here?"

"I have a message for him from his sister who is just dead," said Florence. "If you know where he is, I must beg you to let me know at once. It is of the utmost importance."

Catherine resisted the appeal.

"What I was trying to ascertain is why you should expect to find Mr. Despard here?" she said with as much indifference as she could command.

"I have reason to know that he is following Lord Ilden."

Catherine nodded. This was the admission she had been anxious to obtain.

"You are a friend of Mr. Despard's, and you knew that he was following Lord Ilden," she said judicially. "Can you tell me why he was following him?"

But poor Florence could restrain her anxiety no longer.

"Something has happened," she cried. "Lord Ilden is dead. Why will you not tell me?"

Cathie found it more necessary than ever to steel herself against the agony in the appeal that sounded so real.

"You knew, then, that this Despard intended to take his life. He made the attempt, but I am glad to tell you that it was unsuccessful. Your friend is at the present a fugitive from justice with a price set on his recapture."

Cathie felt half afraid of the open but justifiable hostility she was showing as she watched her visitors' face. It seemed impossible to believe that the glow of relief over-spreading it could be anything but genuine. Her own hostility seemed lost sight of.

"And Lord Ilden was not injured?" she asked, anxiously.

"Thanks to the courage and promptitude of his cousin, Mr. Grant Ilden, he escaped without a scratch. But you have not told me who you are."

Florence looked at the questioner hesitatingly. She had entered Pennybrook Hall with even more vague apprehension than Catherine had felt in admitting her. Clearly, as it seemed to be shown all Lord Ilden's danger was due to Guy Despard and his resentment on Daisy's account, she could not entirely free herself of the distrust which he had made her feel of his relatives. She could still remember that he had imagined it unsafe for anybody at Pennybrook Hall to know where she was, and, although she had been compelled to transgress his wishes and show herself there, she was still hoping to hide her identity.

"I would rather that you did not ask me, please," she said quickly. "I only want to know where Lord Ilden is gone, so that I may follow and warn him. You say that Mr. Despard is still hiding?"

Catherine's face clouded with fresh suspicion at the refusal. If, as she had suspected from the first, this was the adventuress whom George had made his wife, what object could she have in hiding her identity, unless she was playing a part of which she did not want her husband to hear.

"But if you do not give me your name," she said, "how do I know that you are not in league with this man, Despard, with whose plot against my cousin's life you admit yourself acquainted? How do I know that you are not seeking Lord Ilden's whereabouts to betray them to your accomplice?"

And she opened the door.

"Wardle, will you ask your master to come here?"

The butler hurried away to obey the order. But Florence had already taken alarm at it. The Honourable Jasper Ilden would probably recognise her, and her identity could be hidden no longer. Her nervous fear of her husband's relatives came back with redoubled force. They would not tell her where Lord Ilden was. They might even detain her. She had run into the danger against which her husband had warned her. And with a sudden remorse she realised that she had disobeyed him uselessly. At the best she had done no good. She might for all she knew have fallen into a plot which he saw more clearly than she.

She made her way to the door.

"I do not wish to see anybody," she said with dignity. "You will not tell me where Lord Ilden is. I must discover for myself. Please allow me to pass."

For Catherine, more suspicious than ever, had her back to the door. The fact made her visitor desperate, and she exerted all her strength to fling it open. Once out of the room into which she had been entrapped she would be able to get away from the house and escape.

But as she reached the hall a fresh obstacle presented itself. Two young men were entering from the grounds, and for a moment she stopped hopelessly. Then with a sudden thrill of happy surprise she started forward, calling her husband's name.

But the hope lived only for a moment. As the elder of the two young men turned his face she realised that she had made a mistake. It was not her husband, and panic seized her again. Catherine was close behind her, red and excited, the two men staring in surprise in the doorway.

Then Percival Ilden came forward raising his hat.

"Lady Ilden, I believe. You have heard of this attempt

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on Ilden's life, and come to assure yourself of his safety. I am afraid that he has already left Pennybrook."

To the frightened girl, prejudiced in his favour by his superficial resemblance to George, his voice sounded sympathetic. She turned to him appealingly.

"You will tell me where he has gone, and let me follow him to warn him of his danger?"

"I imagine that Ilden has received as much warning as he needs," said Percival; "but of course you will be anxious to join him."

Grant, who remained in the doorway, had eyes only for Catherine. It was apparent that some hostile passage had taken place between the two girls, and the fact sickened him. Had Catherine allowed her jealousy to carry her so far as that?

"Surely nobody wishes to prevent you following your husband, Lady Ilden?" he said suspiciously, and her instinctive glance at Catherine answered the question eloquently.

But she was replying to Percival, on whom her hopes of escape centred themselves.

"I have a message to Mr. Despard from his sister which might change his terrible purpose. If he finds my husband, and I am sure that he is pursuing him still, I must be there to make them understand."

Percival changed colour.

"You have a message from Despard's sister?"

"A dying message," she answered quickly, "which must surely affect him. She died yesterday, and they were her last words"

Percival's face had grown even more ghastly. He was not sorry that Catherine saved him the necessity of replying. He wanted time to think.

Grant's glance had made Cathie's colour flame higher, and made her feel the need of justifying herself. Perhaps it had made her wonder a little also whether the justification was possible. As usual, she had acted on impulse, and was troubled now by the second thoughts that always punish impulsive action. Had she permitted her prejudice to make her unjust and horrible? The girl's admitted acquaintance with the Despards seemed to awaken no suspicion in the minds of the men listening to her.

"Lady Ilden would not tell me her name, although I guessed it," she said, hotly still. "She admits that she knew Despard was coming here to attempt George's life. I do not think we ought to let her go until she tells us how she knew."

"She has already told us," said Grant coldly. "She is acquainted with the man's sister, and received a death-bed confession from her yesterday, which naturally brought her here."

"She ought at least to tell us why her *friend*, Despard, has been attempting George's life," protested Cathie. "If she will tell us *that*, I shall be willing to admit that she is not Despard's accomplice."

"An accomplice of the man who has attempted her husband's life!" cried Grant, sharply. "That is preposterous."

"And as for Despard's motive, that is of more importance for Ilden to know than for us," put in Percival. "We only waste Lady Ilden's time when she ought to be joining her husband. I can quite understand your eagerness, Lady Ilden, and will see you to the station at once, if I may."

The sound of footsteps on the stairs, which warned him that his uncle and the butler were approaching, made him throw open the door impatiently, and he was relieved to find Florence fully as eager as himself to leave the house. She followed him gratefully, welcoming the quick pace at which he strode down the avenue.

The master of the house reached the hall, to find the suspect gone.

"What is this," he said thickly to Grant, "Wardle tells me that we have an accomplice of Despard's here?"

(*Continued on next page.*)

Slept for Three Months.

No one has ever explained satisfactorily the mysterious arts of the Indian jugglers. One of these men performed some time ago the remarkable feat of putting himself to sleep, and allowing himself to be buried in a sealed vault for three months. This trick of being able to induce at pleasure a prolonged sleep is one which, were the secret generally known, would save a great amount of suffering, for when one cannot obtain proper rest at night by reason of pain, the whole system becomes undermined, and rendered exposed to diseases even deadly in their nature. It was while she was in this condition that Chas. Forde's bile beans came to the rescue of Mrs. Davidson of Dunhead Farm, Monikie, near Dundee. "For twenty years," said she to a Dundee newspaper man, "a night's sound sleep was denied me on account of acute biliousness and indigestion. Night after night I sat up in bed racked with pain. I had awful pains across my back, shoulders, and stomach, and I was also subject to dizziness. Often a mist would rise up before my eyes and almost blind me, and the terrible pain would make me feel quite faint. A doctor whom I consulted told me that I should never be properly cured, so you can imagine that I was in despair. One day one of my sons brought me a box of Bile Beans, and I began taking them. For the first few days I felt no better, but then, as I continued to take the beans, my health slowly improved. I got a night's undisturbed sleep, the first for twenty years! Then my ailments slowly but surely left me, until after a few months I found myself quite cured. I can always rely on having a good night's rest now. That it was bile beans alone that cured me I am quite certain, and I shall never be without a box in the house." If you are suffering as Mrs. Davidson did, give bile beans a fair trial, and you, too, will have cause to bless them. For biliousness, indigestion, dizziness, sleeplessness, liver and kidney disorder, Chas. Forde's bile beans are the best possible remedy. They are also a certain cure for constipation, piles, neuralgia, colds, rheumatism, anæmia, and all female ailments. They cost one and three halfpence or two and nine, of all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, E.C. They are a boon to sufferers from sleeplessness, curing this by removing its causes.

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"Catherine will tell you about it. I confess that I cannot understand her view."

Meanwhile Percival had begun to talk as they passed out of the avenue gates, after giving a long backward glance to make sure that they were not being followed.

"Did Miss Hay tell you where Ilden had gone?" he asked, and was relieved to find that Catherine, probably the only person at the Hall who actually knew, had given no information. Catherine's attitude was a complete puzzle to him; but the fact that he could not understand it at all rendered it none the less fortunate for him.

"It is lucky, then, that my cousin took me into his confidence over his plans," he went on easily. "The attack on his life last night, together with the knowledge that the man who wishes to kill him is still at large have, of course, made him very nervous. His idea is to keep out of the way so far as possible, until Despard is captured. My uncle has offered a reward for his arrest, and we are, of course, scouring the neighbourhood. Meanwhile Ilden thought it best to retire to Scotland. You know, of course, that he has a small hunting-box there at Lochtarry?—he wrote to you last night, asking you to meet him there. Did you not get it by this morning's post?"

"I have been travelling all night," she said, her voice trembling a little to think that she must travel so far before her quest was ended. "But if you are quite sure, I shall, of course, go there at once without returning to Sydenham."

Percival glanced over his shoulder once more. Nobody was following.

"Oh, there is no doubt at all that Ilden has gone to Lochtarry. You will probably overtake him, though, before he reaches Edinburgh."

Her face brightened at the hope, but fell again suddenly, and she walked on in troubled silence.

"You think it best to follow your husband at once, do you not?" he asked nervously, as she remained silent, and Florence answered timidly.

"I have no money. I came direct from my poor friend's death-bed with her message, and did not think of money. I had just sufficient in my purse to bring me here, but now——"

He was thankful to remember that he had a five pound note in his pocket, and offered it very gracefully.

Poor Florence felt more than ever grateful to him.

"But I do not know to whom I am indebted for so much kindness," she said, as she accepted it. "You speak of Lord Ilden as your cousin. Are you, then, Mr. Percival Ilden."

She wondered as she spoke that George should have expressed some suspicion of such a man if her surmise were correct.

But Percival had always been chary of giving his name when engaged on an enterprise for which a reckoning might have to be paid.

"No, I am Grant Ilden," he said, and held out his hand to her.

"I am sorry that I cannot see you all the way to the station, but I start very shortly for Mordenhale. My poor father's body is to be taken home to-day."

Prudence had suggested that it would be impolitic to be seen more than was necessary with Lady Ilden, now that his purpose was achieved.

There was little chance now that Daisy Despard's message would be delivered either to her brother or to Ilden till after the funeral at Mordenhale, and by that time, if he judged Despard's mood rightly, one would be dead and the other a murderer under lock and key.

So far, all, apparently, was working exactly as he would have desired.

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Florence Goes North.

Meanwhile, Catherine had felt her suspicion against "Despard's accomplice" only increased by Percival's championship. For in Ilden's opinion, at least, it was Percival who had permitted the would-be murderer to escape. If George was right, it was not likely that his cousin would wish the woman to be questioned about Despard's motives.

She found it impossible, however, to make the Honourable Jasper share her suspicions.

"Why have they let the young woman go before I have questioned her?" he asked, as Grant turned away with an indignant scorn which he was at no pains to conceal.

"Because she is Lady Ilden," said Catherine, and the old man burst into an amused laugh.

"What! George's new wife and you thought her that man's accomplice. Well, this is a good joke. But you have not let her go away again without taking anything. How far has she come, poor girl?"

"I don't know. Lady Ilden seemed very reticent about her movements. And she certainly had no desire to stay. She took alarm when I sent for you."

Mr. Ilden stared at the tone.

"What do you mean?"

"The fact that she is Lady Ilden does not necessarily prove that she is not Despard's accomplice. If he married an adventuress who only wanted his money and title—she knew that Despard was coming here to try and kill him."

"And came to warn him, I suppose. My dear child, you are talking rubbish. I have seen the girl myself at church, and a very nice girl she seems too. You must not take any notice of the stuff that jealous women like—well—Mrs. Haydon, talk about a pretty woman who has made a good match. If she were an adventuress, she would know better than to let Ilden be killed and lose her position at the Castle. It seems to me that everybody has gone mad about this business. Why, Percy has been telling me that Ilden accuses him of letting that rascal out of the cellar. I hope you have not been saying this sort of thing to the poor girl herself, after the trouble she has had coming here."

"I only suggested sending for you and she took to flight," said Catherine.

"Well, go and bring her back then, and tell her that she had better stay here until George can be wired for. Good gracious, I don't know what George will say when he hears that his wife has been frightened away from the house!"

"Percival is escorting her to the station. If I have been discourteous, I have no doubt that he will atone for it," she said half ironically, thinking meanwhile that the two were spending the time plotting together.

"Oh, if Percival is with her it is all right."

The Honourable Jasper's generous impulses were, as usual, easily satisfied, and he returned to the decanter with which he had been fortifying himself for the funeral arrangements.

Catherine was left to continue her justification of what she had done to herself. And already she was troubled by some very serious misgivings.

As Mr. Ilden had instantly suggested, Lady Ilden's knowledge of Despard's purpose by no means made her an accomplice. It was possible that she had heard of it only in time to take this journey to Pennybrook to warn her husband against it. Had she been implicated she would scarcely have appeared at the house as she had done.

Catherine found herself conjuring up, to her discomfort the picture of an anxious and distraught wife appealing for knowledge of the man she loved, after a night of anxiety, only to be met by suspicion and reticence. And the girl's face had been so sweet and innocent. Was it possible that she had

(Continued on page 702.)

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made a mistake? She could never forgive herself if she had.

For a moment she paced the hall in an agony of indecision. Then she put on her hat hurriedly and set off for the station, missing Percival on the way by taking the short cut to the road through the fir coppice.

She had plenty of time she told herself; for no train started for Rickerby on its way either to London or Ilden Market for fully an hour, but the desire to make amends, if amends were needed, made her walk breathlessly.

As she approached the station a train was coming in, but the fact did not affect her for it was going north. It was in the station when she approached the other platform searching in vain there for the figure she expected.

Had Percival not taken her to the station at all she asked herself, with a growing suspicion of the man to compensate for that of his companion.

At the other side of the station they were already closing the doors of the standing train preparatory to its starting again.

But Catherine crossed the bridge without haste. It was only as a matter of form that she was going to assure herself that Lady Ilden was not on the other platform.

The train was beginning to move as she reached it, and the station-master, recognising a lady from the Hall, questioned her with a glance.

Catherine shook her head, she was not going on in the train, and he closed the door he had been holding open.

Then to his astonishment Miss Hay rushed suddenly across the platform, threw open one of the doors for herself, and scrambled into the train just as its speed had made the performance dangerous.

She had acted as usual on impulse, the turn being given to her decision by the fact that the face she had seen at the window of the compartment, and recognised, was the face of a woman in tears.

(The plot against Ilden comes near to being unravelled in next Tuesday's instalment.)

Another New Serial.

The story which starts in a fortnight's time will, as I told you last week, be from the pen of Mr. Louis Tracy, the clever author of many serials and successful novels.

To those of my readers who have been readers for some years past, there is no need to emphasise the excellence of his fiction. For he it was who wrote those excellent stories "The Lost Lady Delia" and "The Shadow Hand." My new story is every whit as good as these two, and I am sure will rivet your attention from the opening to the final sentence.

The story deals with the mysterious robbery of some priceless jewels from the residence of some Turkish officials in London, both the plot and the incidents of the story being most graphically and thrillingly presented. The first instalment will appear in a fortnight's time.

The tramp who had been into the house prospecting came out and joined his companion on the roadside. "What luck?" asked the waiting one. "None," growled the other. "I don't like this business of asking for bread and getting a stone." "Well," said the first one in a tone of philosophic resignation, "'taint half as bad as askin' for bread and getting a bulldog."

Little Miss Lily has been allowed to come to the table on the occasion of her mamma's birthday, after promising that she would be very, very good. Unfortunately she was seated opposite a gentleman who was entirely bald. After some time spent in contemplation of the phenomenon, she could not help remarking to her mother, in a quite audible stage whisper: "Oh, mamma, see that gentleman. His head is all naked."

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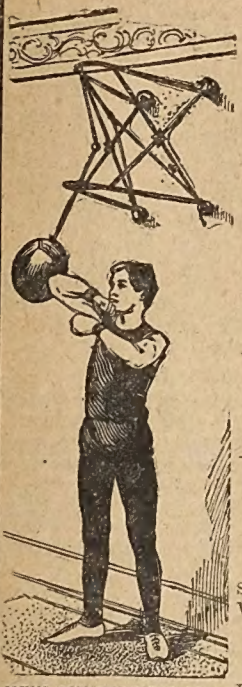

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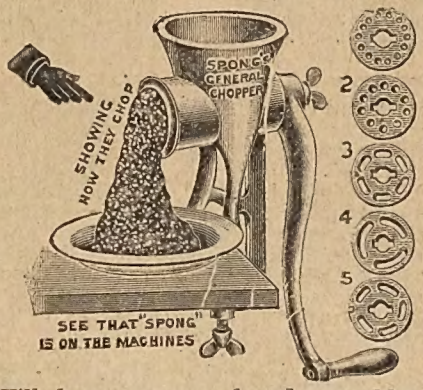

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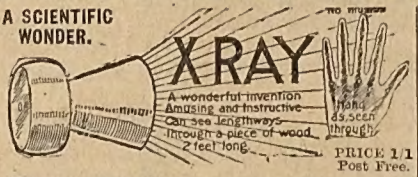
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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

My Well Wishers.

I HAVE received a swarm of kind letters from numerous readers on my approaching marriage, such as I never could have expected. Certainly I cannot express how much I thank one and all for their encouraging words, but next week, in taking farewell of my readers (for a while at any rate), I must at least make an attempt at doing so. Meanwhile, though, as you must know, my time is very, very well occupied, I must snatch a few moments at my favourite work of trying to help readers in their little difficulties and misunderstandings.

Wants to Go Abroad.

"H. B. M." is very interested in my recent correspondent from Africa. No, this gentleman did not send me his photo, but I fear you do not quite understand what an "African" gentleman means at the present day. My correspondent is a Scotsman living in Natal, and not coloured and the possessor of "thick lips," which you say you do not like "very much." But why are you so anxious, "H. B. M," to go abroad? You would not really much care about living in South Africa, unless true love were the motive of your settling down there. I am sure there must be plenty of nice young men in your district, and as you are only twenty, why not give them a chance before thinking of those beyond the seas?

A Case for Patience.

"HALIFAX" has known a girl for a year, but his parents object to their friendship because she has a deformity in the left arm. He is twenty and will abide by any advice I may give him. I do not see why "HALIFAX" should not be friends with a girl, no matter what may be her deformity. But as he is only twenty, I suppose he is sensible enough to know that it is not yet time for him to think of getting married. Let him continue his friendship so long as he and the girl are attracted to each other. If when he arrives at an age and position enabling him to marry, he finds that the girl is still the only possessor of his affections, then he would be silly to allow a deformity to stand in their way.

A Case for Perseverance.

So, "HOPELESS," you are in love with your country cousin, and have sent her your photograph. She replied saying she did not wish to be bothered with a young man, and had not one of her own to send in return. Now you hear she is very upset at having replied like this.

* * * *

I suppose if she does not want to be bothered with a young man, you will not bother her. But she probably did not know her own mind. You should try and find out what she really feels in the matter. There is no reason why you should not continue to write to her of pay other attentions. In time, she will perhaps let you know her true state of mind. I do not at all see what there is to be "hopeless" about. When a man finds that his love is not returned at first, he should continue to pay attentions until he learns definitely that there is or is not hope for him. But do not *bother* her. Surely a man can admire a girl without being a burden to her. Continue to express your feelings, and be "hopeful," not "hopeless," and something is sure to result.

Is He a Consumptive?

"ADA" is receiving attentions from a man whom she likes very well, but his appearance suggests that he is consumptive. Do I advise her to continue the affair?

* * * *

Who said he was consumptive, "ADA"? There are few things about which people are more deceived than consumption. The least likely-looking people have it, and those most likely in appearance, to the lay mind, are often quite free from it. I advise you to try and meet your friend when a doctor is present, and ask the latter privately what he thinks of the young man's appearance. He may be merely in delicate health, or overworked. Certainly find out first before you allow such a circumstance to interfere with your fondness for him. If, of course, he really is consumptive, you should not go on with the affair, as there may be a heavy penalty to pay in the future for doing so.

The Doubtful Rival.

How should a man act towards a girl he admires, when he believes she is the victim of unwelcome attentions from another man? "L. D." is attracted towards Amy, but she is always seeing another man. Once or twice he has noticed that she looks weary and bored in the latter's presence. At other times she has said little things about the other man which suggest that he is not a great favourite with her. What the facts are he does not quite know. They are not engaged.

* * * *

Does she appear pleased to see you? Does she talk intimately of people and things to you? If so, there should be some opening for you to press your own suit. As to the other man, I should say nothing about him to her. If she likes to volunteer any information, take it, and as much as you can. In time, you should have got together evidence enough to enable you to get at her real feelings towards him. But do not jump to conclusions. She may, for all you know, have a real fondness for him, in spite of outward signs, and until you are convinced to the contrary, you have no concern with such attentions as he may pay her while you are as yet only an outside admirer.

The Stage Beauty.

So, "H. F.," you are in love with a most charming young actress, just because of her beautiful stage face, and winning smile. You are only a clerk on a modest salary, so any overtures would not carry you far. How had you better act?

* * * *

You are probably one of a hundred who feel the same towards that young lady. Does this encourage you to further effort? One, probably, of the hundred has the possession which is nine points of the law of love, and any advances on your part might be met by strong muscles. What you are suffering from is not really love at all. People get into similar states over heroines in novels, statues, or pictures. It is a very delightful state to be in, to feel you are drawn towards any image, but it is just as well to separate that from any connection with serious love. Certainly try and meet the girl if you have the slightest chance. How you can do so on ordinary social lines depends on whether you have a mutual friend able to give the introduction. The next step will be the progress you make in interesting her in you. But let me warn you, you have not a very hopeful prospect in front of you, and I think it would be better to cure yourself of the infatuation, and remember that all is not gold that glitters, and that every pretty face is not necessarily that of an angel.

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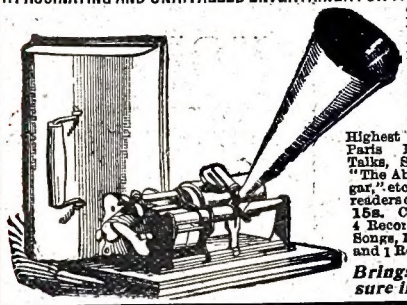

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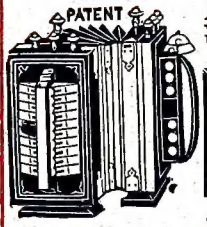

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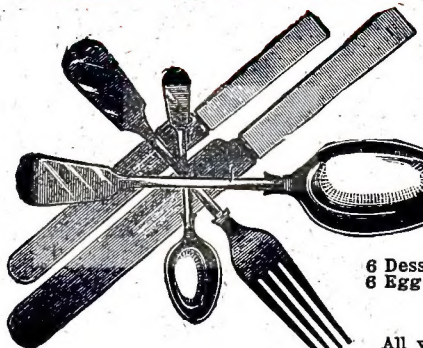

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